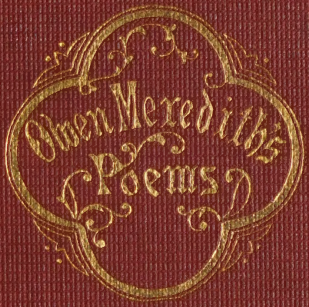
Owen Meredith's
Poems

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OWEN MEREDITH'S POEMS.

POEMS

BY

OWEN MEREDITH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

CLYTEMNESTRA AND NATIONAL SONGS OF SERVIA.

BOSTON:
JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY,
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CLYTEMNESTRA,

THE EARL'S RETURN, THE ARTIST,

AND OTHER POEMS

CLYTEMNESTRA.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

AGAMEMNON.
ÆGISTHUS.
ORESTES.
PHOCIAN.
HERALD.

CLYTEMNESTRA.
ELECTRA.
CASSANDRA.
CHORUS.

SCENE. — *Before the Palace of Agamemnon in Argos. Trophies, amongst which, the shield of Agamemnon, on the wall.*

Time, *Morning.* *The action continues till Sunset.*

I. CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

MORNING at last! at last the lingering day
Creeps o'er the dewy side of yon dark world.
O dawning light already on the hills!
O universal earth, and air, and thou,
First freshness of the east, which art a breath
Breath'd from the rapture of the gods, who bless
Almost all other prayers on earth but mine!
Wherefore to me is solacing sleep denied?
And honourable rest, the right of all?
So that no medicine of the slumbrous shell,
Brimm'd with divinest draughts of melody,
Nor silence under dreamful canopies,

Nor purple cushions of the lofty couch
May lull this fever for a little while.
Wherefore to me — to me, of all mankind,
This retribution for a deed undone?
For many men outlive their sum of crimes,
And eat, and drink, and lift up thankful hands,
And take their rest securely in the dark.
Am I not innocent — or more than these?
There is no blot of murder on my brow,
Nor any taint of blood upon my robe.
— It is the thought! it is the thought! . . . and men
Judge us by acts! . . as tho' one thunder-clap
Let all Olympus out. Unquiet heart,
Ill fares it with thee since, ten sad years past,
In one wild hour of unacquainted joy
Thou didst set wide thy lonely bridal doors
For a forbidden guest to enter in!
Last night, methought pale Helen, with a frown,
Swept by me, murmuring, "I — such as thou —
A Queen in Greece — weak-hearted (woe is me!)
Allured by love — did, in an evil hour,
Fall off from duty. Sorrow came. Beware!"
And then, in sleep, there pass'd a baleful band —
The ghosts of all the slaughter'd under Troy,
From this side Styx, who cried, "For such a crime
"We fell from our fair palaces on earth,
"And wander, starless, here. For such a crime
"A thousand ships were launch'd, and tumbled down
'The topless towers of Ilion, tho' they rose
'To magic music, in the time of Gods!"
With such fierce thoughts for evermore at war,
Vext not alone by hankering wild regrets
But fears, yet worse, of that which soon must come,
My heart waits arm'd, and from the citadel
Of its high sorrow, sees far off dark shapes,

And hears the footsteps of Necessity
Tread near, and nearer, hand in hand with Woe.
Last night the flaming Herald warning urged
Up all the hills — small time to pause and plan!
Counsel is weak: and much remains to do,
That Agamemnon, and, if else remain
Of that enduring band who sail'd for Troy
Ten years ago (and some sail'd Lethe-ward),
Find us not unprepared for their return.

But — hark! I hear the tread of nimble feet
That sound this way. The rising town is pour'd
About the festive altars of the Gods,
And from the heart of the great Agora,
Lets out its gladness for this last night's news.
— Ah, so it is! Insidious, sly Report,
Sounding oblique, like Loxian oracles,
Tells double-tongued (and with the self-same voice!)
To some new gladness, new despair to some.

II. CHORUS AND CLYTEMNESTRA.

CHORUS.

O dearest Lady, daughter of Tyndarus!
With purple flowers we come, and offerings —
Oil, and wine; and cakes of honey,
Soothing, unadulterate; tapestries
Woven by white Argive maidens,
God-descended (woven only
For the homeward feet of Heroes)
To celebrate this glad intelligence
Which last night the fiery courier
Brought us, posting up from Ilion,
Wheel'd above the dusky circle
Of the hills from lighted Ida.
For now (Troy lying extinguisht
Underneath a mighty Woe)

Our King and chief of men,
Agamemnon, returning
(And with him the hope of Argos),
Shall worship at the Tutelary Altars
Of their dear native land:
In the Fane of ancient Herë,
Or the great Lycæan God;
Immortally crown'd with reverend honour!
But tell us wherefore, O godlike woman,
Having a lofty trouble in your eye,
You walk alone with loosened tresses?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Shall the ship toss, and yet the helm not heave?
Shall they drowse sitting at the lower oars,
When those that hold the middle benches wake?
He that is yet sole eye of all our state
Shining not here, shall ours be shut in dreams?
But haply you (thrice happy!) prove not this,
The curse of Queens, and worse than widow'd wives —
To wake, and hear, all night, the wandering gnat
Sing thro' the silent chambers, while Alarm,
In place of Slumber, by the haunted couch
Stands sentinel; or when from coast to coast
Wails the night-wandering wind, or when o'er heaven
Boötes hath unleash'd his fiery hounds,
And Night her glittering camps hath set, and lit
Her watch-fires thro' the silence of the skies,
— To count ill chances in the dark, and feel
Deserted pillows wet with tears, not kisses,
Where kisses once fell.
But now Expectation
Stirs up such restless motions of the blood
As suffer not my lids to harbour sleep.
Wherefore, O belov'd companions,

I wake betimes, and wander up and down,
Looking toward the distant hill-tops,
From whence shall issue fair fulfilment
Of all our ten-years' hoping. For, behold!
Troy being captiv'd, we shall see once more
Those whom we loved in days of old.
Yet some will come not from the Phrygian shore,
But there lie weltering to the surf and wind;
Exil'd from day, in darkness blind,
Or having crost unhappy Styx.
And some who left us full of vigorous youth
Shall greet us now gray-headed men.
But if our eyes behold again
Our long-expected chief, in truth,
Fortune for us hath thrown the Treble Six.

CHORUS.

By us, indeed, these things are also wisht.
Wherefore, if now to this great son of Atreus
(Having surviv'd the woful walls of Troy),
With us, once more, the Gods permit to stand
A glad man by the pillars of his hearth,
Let his dear life henceforth be such wherein
The Third Libation often shall be pour'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And let his place be number'd with the Gods,
Who overlook the world's eternal walls,
Out of all reach of sad calamities.

CHORUS.

It is not well, I think, that men should set
Too near the Gods any of mortal kind:
But brave men are as Gods upon the earth.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And whom Death daunts not, these are truly brave.

CHORUS.

But more than all I reckon that man blest,
Who, having sought Death nobly, finds it not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Except he find it where he does not seek.

CHORUS.

You speak in riddles.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

For so Wisdom speaks.
But now do you with garlands wreathe the altars,
While I, within, the House prepare.
That so our King, at his returning,
With his golden Armament,
Find us not unaware
Of the greatness of the event.

CHORUS.

Soon shall we see the faces that we loved.
Brother once more clasping brother,
As in the unforgotten days:
And heroes, meeting one another
(Men by glorious toils approved)
Where once they roved,
Shall rove again the old familiar ways.
And they that from the distance come
Shall feed their hearts with tales of home;
And tell the famous story of the war,
Rumour'd sometime from afar.
Now shall these again behold
The ancient Argos; and the grove
Long since trod
By the frenzied child of Inachus;
And the Forum, famed of old,
Of the wolf-destroying God;
And the opulent Mycenæ,

Home of the Pelopidæ,
While they rove with those they love,
Holding pleasant talk with us.
O how gloriously they went,
That avenging Armament!
As tho' Olympus in her womb
No longer did entomb
The greatness of a bygone world —
Gods and godlike men —
But cast them forth again
To frighten Troy: such storm was hurl'd
On her devoted towers
By the retributive Deity,
Whosoe'er he be
Of the Immortal Powers —
Or mad'ning Pan, if he chastise
His Shepherd's Phrygian treacheries;
Or vengeful Loxias; or Zeus,
Anger'd for the shame and abuse
Of a great man's hospitality.

As wide as is Olympus' span
Is the power of the high Gods;
Who, in their golden blest abodes
See all things, looking from the sky;
And Heaven is hard to pacify
For the wickedness of man.
My heart is fill'd with vague forebodings,
And opprest by unknown terrors
Lest, in the light of so much gladness,
Rise the shadow of ancient wrong.
O Dæmon of the double lineage
Of Tantalus; and the Pleisthenidæ,
Inexorable in thy mood,
On the venerable threshold
Of the ancient House of Pelops
Surely is enough of blood!
Wherefore does my heart misgive me?
Wherefore comes this doubt to grieve me?

O, may no Divine Envy
Follow home the Argive army,
Being vext for things ill-done
In wilful pride of stubborn war,
Long since, in the distant lands!
May no Immortal wrath pursue
Our dear King, the Light of Argos,
For the unhappy sacrifice
Of a daughter; working evil
In the dark heart of a woman;
Or some household treachery,
And a curse from kindred hands!

III. CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

[Reëntering from the house.

To-morrow . . . ay, what if to-day? . . . Well — then?
Why, if those tongues of flame, with which last night
The land was eloquent, spoke certain truth,
By this perchance thro' green Saronic rocks
Those black ships glide . . . perchance . . . well, what's to fear?
'Twere well to dare the worst — to know the end —
Die soon, or live secure. What's left to add
To years of nights like those which I have known?
Shall I shrink now to meet one little hour
Which I have dared to contemplate for years?
By all the Gods, not so! The end crowns all,
Which if we fail to seize, that's also lost
Which went before: as who would lead a host
Thro' desolate dry places, yet return

In sight of kingdoms, when the Gods are roused
To mark the issue? . . . And yet, yet —
I think
Three nights ago there must have been sea-storms.
The wind was wild among the Palace towers:
Far off upon the hideous Element
I know it huddled up the petulant waves,
Whose shapeless and bewildering precipices
Led to the belly of Orcus . . . oh, to slip
Into dark Lethe from a dizzy plank,
When even the Gods are reeling on the poop!
To drown at night, and have no sepulchre! —
That were too horrible! . . . yet it may be
Some easy chance, that comes with little pain,
Might rid me of the haunting of those eyes,
And these wild thoughts . . . To know he roved among
His old companions in the Happy Fields,
And ranged with heroes — I still innocent!
Sleep would be natural then.
Yet will the old time
Never return! never those peaceful hours!
Never that careless heart! and nevermore,
Ah, nevermore that laughter without pain!
But I, that languish for repose, must fly it,
Nor, save in daring, doing, taste of rest.
Oh to have lost all these! To have barter'd calm,
And all the irrevocable wealth of youth,
And gain'd . . . what? But this change hat surely come,
Even were all things other than they are.
I blame myself o'ermuch, who should blame time,
And life's inevitable loss, and fate,
And days grown lovelier in the retrospect.
We change: wherefore look back? The path to safety
Lies forward . . . forward ever.

[*In passing toward the house she recognizes the shield of Agamemnon, and pauses before it.*

Ha! old shield,
Hide up for shame that honest face of thine.
Stare not so bluntly at us . . . Oh, this man!
Why sticks the thought of him so in my heart?
If I had loved him once — if for one hour —
Then were there treason in this falling off.
But never did I feel this wretched heart
Until it leap'd beneath Ægisthus' eyes.
Who could have so forecounted all from first?
From that flusht moment when his hand in mine
Rested a thought too long, a touch too kind,
To leave its pulse unwarm'd . . . but I remember
I dream'd sweet dreams that night, and slept till dawn,
And woke with flutterings of a happy thought,
And felt, not worse, but better . . . and now . . . now?
When first a strange and novel tenderness
Quiver'd in these salt eyes, had one said then
"A bead of dew may drag a deluge down:" —
In that first pensive pause, through which I watch'd
Unwonted sadness on Ægisthus' brows,
Had some one whisper'd, "Ay, the summer-cloud
Comes first: the tempest follows." —
Well, what's past
Is past. Perchance the worst's to follow yet.
How thou art hackt, and hewn, and bruis'd, old shield!
Was the whole edge of the war against one man?
But one thrust more upon this dexter ridge
Had quite cut thro' the double inmost hide.
He must have stood to it well! Oh, he was cast
I' the mould of Titans: a magnificent man,
With head and shoulders like a God's. He seem'd
Too brimful of this merry vigorous life
To spill it all out at one stab o' the sword.

Yet that had help'd much ill . . . oh Destiny
Makes cowards or makes culprits of us all!
Ah, had some Trojan weapon . . . Fool! fool! fool!
Surely sometimes the unseen Eumenides
Do prompt our musing moods with wicked hints,
And lash us for our crimes ere we commit them.
Here, round this silver boss, he cut my name,
Once — long ago: he cut it as he lay
Tired out with brawling pastimes — prone — his limbs
At length diffused — his head droopt in my lap —
His spear flung by: Electra by the hearth
Sat with the young Orestes on her knee;
While he, with an old broken sword, hack'd out
These crooked characters, and laugh'd to see
(Sprawl'd from the unused strength of his large hands)
The marks make CLYTEMNESTRA.
How he laugh'd!
Ægisthus' hands are smaller.
Yet I know
That matrons envied me my husband's strength.
And I remember when he strode among
The Argive crowd he topp'd them by a head,
And tall men stood wide-eyed to look at him,
Where his great plumes went tossing up and down
The brazen prores drawn out upon the sand.
War on his front was graved, as on thy disk,
Shield! which he left to keep his memory
Grand in men's mouths: that some revered old man,
Winning to this the eyes of our hot youth,
Might say, "'Twas here, and here — this dent, and that —
On such, and such a field (which we remember)
That Agamemnon, in the great old time,
Held up the Battle."

Now lie there, and rust!
Thy uses all have end. Thy master's home
Should harbour none but friends.
O triple brass,
Iron, and oak! the blows of blundering men
Clang idly on you: what fool's strength is yours
For, surely, not the adamantine tunic
Of Ares, nor whole shells of blazing plates,
Nor ashen spear, nor all the cumbrous coil
Of seven bull's hides may guard the strongest king
From one defenceless woman's quiet hate.

What noise was that? Where can Ægisthus be?
Ægisthus! — my Ægisthus! . . . There again!
Louder, and longer — from the Agora —
A mighty shout: and now I see i' the air
A rolling dust the wind blows near. Ægisthus!
O much I fear . . . this wild-will'd race of ours
Doth ever, like a young unbroken colt,
Chafe at the straighten'd bridle of our state —
If they should find him lone, irresolute,
As is his wont . . . I know he lacks the eye
And forehead wherewith crown'd Capacity
Awes rash Rebellion back.
Again that shout!
Gods keep Ægisthus safe! myself will front
This novel storm. How my heart leaps to danger!
I have been so long a pilot on rough seas,
And almost rudderless!
O yet 'tis much
To feel a power, self-centred, self-assured,
Bridling a glorious danger! as when one
That knows the nature of the elements
Guides some frail plank with sublime skill that wins
Progress from all obstruction; and, erect,

Looks bold and free down all the dripping stars,
Hearing the hungry storm boom baffled, by.
Ægisthus! . . . hark! . . . Ægisthus! . . . there . . .
Ægisthus!
I would to all the Gods I knew him safe!
Who comes this way, guiding his racing feet
Safe to us, like a nimble charioteer?

IV. CLYTEMNESTRA. HERALD.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now, gloom-bird! are there prodigies about?
What new ill-thing sent thee before?

HERALD.

O Queen —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Speak, if thou hast a voice! I listen.

HERALD.

O Queen —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hath an ox trodden on thy tongue? . . . Speak then!

HERALD.

O Queen (for haste hath caught away my breath),
The King is coming.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Say again — the King
Is coming —

HERALD.

Even now, the broad sea-fields

Grow white with flocks of sails, and toward the west
The sloped horizon teems with rising beaks.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The people know this?

HERALD.

Heard you not the noise?
For soon as this wing'd news had toucht the gate
The whole land shouted in the sun.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So soon!
The thought's outsped by the reality,
And halts agape . . . the King —

HERALD.

How she is moved
A noble woman!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Wherefore beat so fast,
Thou foolish heart? 'tis not thy master —

HERALD.

Truly
She looks all over Agamemnon's mate.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Destiny, Destiny! The deed's half done.

HERALD

She will not speak, save by that brooding eye
Whose light is language. Some great thought, I see,
Mounts up the royal chambers of her blood,
As a king mounts his palace; holds high pomp
In her Olympian bosom; gains her face,

Possesses all her noble glowing cheek
With sudden state; and gathers grandly up
Its slow majestic meanings in her eyes!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So quick this sudden joy hath taken us,
I scarce can realize the sum of it.
You say the King comes here — the King, my husband,
Whom we have waited for ten years — O joy!
Pardon our seeming roughness at the first.
Hope, that will often fawn upon despair
And flatter desperate chances, when the event
Falls at our feet, soon takes a querulous tone,
And jealous of that perfect joy she guards
(Lest the ambrosial fruit by some rude hand
Be stol'n away from her, and never tasted),
Barks like a lean watch-dog at all who come.
But now do you, with what good speed you may,
Make known this glad intelligence to all.
Ourselves, within, as best befits a wife
And woman, will prepare my husband's house.
Also, I pray you, summon to our side
Our cousin, Ægisthus. We would speak with him.
We would that our own lips should be the first
To break these tidings to him; so obtaining
New joy by sharing his. And, for yourself,
Receive our gratitude. For this great news
Henceforth you hold our royal love in fee.
Our fairest fortunes from this day I date,
And to the House of Tantalus new honour.

HERALD.

She's gone! With what a majesty she fill'd
The whole of space! The statues of the Gods
Are not so godlike. She has Herë's eyes,
And looks immortal!

V. CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*as she ascends the steps of the Palace*).

So . . . while on the verge
Of some wild purpose we hang dizzily,
Weighing the danger of the leap below
Against the danger of retreating steps,
Upon a sudden, some forecast event,
Issuing full-arm'd from Councils of the Gods,
Strides to us, plucks us by the hair, and hurls
Headlong pale conscience, to the abyss of crime.
Well — I shrink not. 'Tis but a leap in life.
There's fate in this. Why is he here so soon?
The sight of whose abhorréd eyes will add
Whatever lacks of strength to this resolve.
Away with shame! I have had enough of it.
What's here for shame? . . . the weak against the strong?
And if the weak be victor? . . . what of that?
Tush! . . . there — my soul is set to it. What need
Of argument to justify an act
Necessity compels, and must absolve?
I have been at play with scruples — like a girl.
Now they are all flung by. I have talk'd with Crime
Too long to play the prude. These thoughts have been
Wild guests by night. Now I shall dare to do
That which I did not dare to think . . . oh, now
know myself! Crime's easier than we dream.

CHORUS.

Upon the everlasting hills
Thronéd Justice works, and waits.
Between the shooting of a star,
That falls unseen on summer nights
Out of the bosom of the dark,

And the magnificent march of War,
Roll'd from angry lands afar
Round some doomèd city-gates,
Nothing is to her unknown;

Nothing unseen.
Upon her hills she sits alone,
And in the balance of Eternity
Poises against the What-has-been
The weight of What-shall-be.
She sums the account of human ills.
The great world's hoarded wrongs and rights
Are in her treasures. She will mark,
With inward-searching eyes sublime,
The frauds of Time.
The empty future years she fills
Out of the past. All human wills
Sway to her on her reachless heights.

Wisdom she teaches men, with tears,
In the toilful school of years:
Climbing from event to event.
And, being patient, is content
To stretch her sightless arms about,
And find some human instrument,
From many sorrows to work out
Her doubtful, far, accomplishment.

She the two Atridæ sent
Upon Ilion: being intent
The heapt-up wrath of Heaven to move
Against the faithless Phrygian crime.
Them the Thunder-bird of Jove,
Swooping sudden from above,
Summon'd to fates sublime.

She, being injured, for the sake
Of her, the often-wedded wife
(Too loved, and too adoring!)

Many a brazen band did break
In many a breathless battle-strife;
Many a noble life did take;
Many a headlong agony,
Frenzied shout, and frantic cry,
For Greek and Trojan storing.
When, the spear in the onset being shiver'd,
The reeling ranks were roll'd together
Like mad waves mingling in windy weather,
Dasht fearfully over and over each other.
And the plumes of Princes were toss'd and thrust,
And dragg'd about in the shameful dust;
And the painful, panting breath
Came and went in the tug of death:
And the sinews were loosen'd, and the strong knees stricken:
And the eyes began to darken and thicken:
And the arm of the mighty and terrible quiver'd.

O Love! Love! Love! How terrible art thou!
How terrible!
Oh, what hast thou to do
With men of mortal years,
Who toil below,
And have enough of griefs for tears to flow?
Oh, range in higher spheres!
Hast thou, O hast thou, no diviner hues
To paint thy wings, but must transfuse
An Iris-light from tears?
For human hearts are all too weak to hold thee.
And how, O Love, shall human arms enfold thee?
There is a seal of sorrow on thy brow.
There is a deadly fire in thy breath.
With life thou lurest, yet thou givest death.
O Love, the Gods are weak by reason of thee;
And many wars have been upon the earth.
Thou art the sweetest source of saltest sorrows.
Thy blest to-days bring such unblest to-morrows;

Thy softest hope makes saddest memory.
Thou hadst destruction in thee from the birth;
Incomprehensible!

O Love, thy brightest bridal garments
Are poison'd, like that robe of agonies
Which Deianira wove for Hercules,
And, being put on, turn presently to cerements!

Thou art unconquered in the fight.
Thou rangest over land and sea.
O let the foolish nations be!
Keep thy divine desire
To upheave mountains or to kindle fire
From the frore frost, and set the world alight.
Why make thy red couch in the damask cheek?
Or light thy torch at languid eyes?
Or lie entangled in soft sighs
On pensive lips that will not speak?
To sow the seeds of evil things
In the hearts of headstrong kings?
Preparing many a kindred strife
For the fearful future hour?
O leave the wretched race of man,
Whose days are but the dying seasons' span;
Vex not his painful life!
Make thy immortal sport
In Heaven's high court,
And cope with Gods that are of equal power.

VI. ELECTRA CHORUS. CLYTEMNESTRA.

ELECTRA.

Now is at hand the hour of retribution.
For my father, at last returning,
In great power, being greatly injur'd,
Will destroy the base adulterer,
And efface the shameful Past.

CHORUS.

O child of the Godlike Agamemnon!
Leave vengeance to the power of Heaven,
Nor forestall with impious footsteps
The brazen tread of black Erinnys.

ELECTRA.

Is it, besotted with the adulterous sin,
Or, as with flattery pleasing present power
Or, being intimidate, you speak these words

CHORUS.

Nay, but desiring justice, like yourself.

ELECTRA.

Yet Justice ofttimes uses mortal means.

CHORUS.

But flings aside her tools when work is done

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O dearest friends, inform me, went this way
Ægisthus?

CHORUS.

Even now, hurrying hitherward
I see him walk, with irritated eyes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A reed may show which way the tempest blows
That face is pale — those brows are dark . . . all

VII. ÆGISTHUS. CLYTEMNESTRA.

ÆGISTHUS.

Agamemnon —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My husband . . . well?

ÆGISTHUS.

(Whom may the great Gods curse!)
Is scarce an hour hence.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Then that hour's yet saved
From sorrow. Smile, Ægisthus —

ÆGISTHUS.

Hear me speak.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not as your later wont has been to smile —
Quick, fierce, as tho' you scarce could hurry out
The wild thing fast enough; for smiling's sake,
As if to show you could smile, tho' in fear
Of what might follow — but as first you smiled
Years, years ago, when some slow loving thought
Stole down your face, and settled on your lips,
As tho' a sunbeam halted on a rose
And mix'd with fragrance, light. Can you smile still
Just so, Ægisthus?

ÆGISTHUS.

These are idle words,
And like the wanderings of some fever'd brain:
Extravagant phrases, void of import, wild.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, no! you cannot smile so, more. Nor I!

ÆGISTHUS.

Hark! in an hour the King —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hush! listen now —
I hear, far down yon vale, a shepherd piping
Hard by his milk-white flock. The lazy things!

How quietly they sleep or feed among
The dry grass and the acanthus there! . . . and he,
He hath flung his faun-skin by, and white ash-stick,
You hear his hymn? Something of Dryope,
Faunus, and Pan . . . an old wood tale, no doubt!
It makes me think of songs when I was young
I used to sing between the valleys there,
Or higher up among the red ash-berries,
Where the goats climb, and gaze. Do you remember
That evening when we linger'd all alone,
Below the city, and one yellow star
Shook o'er yon temple? . . . ah, and you said then
"Sweet, should this evening never change to night,
But pause, and pause, and stay just so — yon star
Still steadfast — and the moon behind the hill,
Still rising, never risen — would this seem strange?
Or should we say, 'why halts the day so late?'"
Do you remember?

ÆGISTHUS.

Woman! woman! this
Surpasses frenzy! Not a breath of time
Between us and the clutch of Destiny —
Already sound there footsteps at our heels,
Already comes a heat against our cheek,
Already fingers cold among our hair,
And you speak lightly thus, as tho' the day
Linger'd toward nuptial hours! . . . awake arouse!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I do wake . . . well, the King —

ÆGISTHUS.

Even while we speak
Draws near. And we —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Must meet him.

ÆGISTHUS.

Meet? ay . . . how?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

As mortals should meet fortune — calmly

ÆGISTHUS.

Quick!
Consult! consult! Yet there is time to choose
The path to follow.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I have chosen it
Long since.

ÆGISTHUS

How? —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, have we not had ten years
To ripen counsel, and mature resolve?
What's to add now?

ÆGISTHUS.

I comprehend you not.
The time is plucking at our sleeve.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ægisthus.
There shall be time for deeds, and soon enough,
Let that come when it may. And it may be
Deeds must be done shall shut and shrivel up

All quiet thoughts, and quite preclude repose
To the end of time. Upon this awful strait
And promontory of our mortal life
We stand between what was, and is not yet.
The Gods allot to us a little space,
Before the contests which must soon begin,
For calmer breathing. All before lies dark
And difficult, and perilous, and strange;
And all behind . . . What if we take one look,
One last long lingering look (before Despair,
The shadow of failure, or remorse, which often
Waits on success, can come 'twixt us and it,
And darken all) at that which yet must seem
Undimm'd in the long retrospect of years —
The beautiful imperishable Past!
Were this not natural, being innocent now
— At least of that which is the greater crime?
To-night we shall not be so.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ah, to-night!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

All will be done which now the Gods foresee.
The sun shines still.

ÆGISTHUS.

I oft have mark'd some day
Begin all gold in its flusht orient,
With splendid promise to the waiting world,
And turn to blackness ere the sun ran down.
So draws our love to its dark close. To-night —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Shall bring our bridals, my Belov'd! For, either
Upon the melancholy shores of Death
(One shadow near the doors of Pluto) greeted
By pale Proserpina, our steps shall be,
Or else, secure, in the great empty palace

We shall sleep crown'd — no noise to startle us —
And Argos silent round us — all our own!

ÆGISTHUS.

In truth I do not dare to think this thing.
For all the Greeks will hate us.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What of that?
If that they do not harm us — as who shall?

ÆGISTHUS.

Moreover, tho' we triumph in the act
(And we may fail, and fall) we shall go down
Cover'd with this reproach into the tomb,
Hunted by all the red Eumenides;
And, in the end, the ghost of him we slew,
Being beforehand there, will come between
Us and the awful Judges of the dead!
And no one on this earth will pray for us;
And no hand will hang garlands on our urns,
Either of man, or maid, or little child;
But we shall be dishonour'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O faint heart!
When this poor life of ours is done with — all
Its foolish days put by — its bright and dark —
Its praise and blame — roll'd quite away — gone o'er
Like some brief pageant — will it stir us more,
Where we are gone, how men may hoot or shout
After our footsteps, than the dust and garlands
A few mad boys and girls fling in the air
When a great host is pass'd, can cheer or vex
The minds of men already out of sight
Toward other lands, with pæan and with pomp
Array'd near vaster forces? For the future,
We will smoke hecatombs, and build new fanes,

And be you sure the gods deal leniently
With those who grapple for their life, and pluck it
From the closed grip of Fate, albeit perchance
Some ugly smutch, some drop of blood or so,
A spot here, there a streak, or stain of gore,
Should in the contest fall to them, and mar
That life's original whiteness.

ÆGISTHUS.

Tombs have tongues
That talk in Hades. Think it! Dare we hope,
This done, to be more happy?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My Belov'd,
We are not happy — we may never be,
Perchance, again. Yet it is much to think
We have been so: and ev'n tho' we must weep,
We have enjoy'd.
The roses and the thorns
We have pluckt together. We have proved both
Say,
Was it not worth the bleeding hands they left us
To have won such flowers? And if 'twere possible
To keep them still — keep even the wither'd leaves
Even the wither'd leaves are worth our care.
We will not tamely give up life — such life!
What tho' the years before, like those behind,
Be dark as clouds the thunder sits among,
Tipt only here and there with a wan gold
More bright for rains between? — 'tis much — 'tis
more,
For we shall ever think "the sun's behind.
The sun must shine before the day goes down!"
Anything better than the long, long night,
And that perpetual silence of the tomb!
'Tis not for happier hours, but life itself
Which may bring happier hours, we strike at Fate
Why, tho' from all the treasury of the Past

'Tis but one solitary gem we save —
One kiss more such as we have kist, one smile,
One more embrace, one night more such as those
Which we have shared, how costly were the prize,
How richly worth the attempt! Indeed, I know,
When yet a child, in those dim pleasant dreams
A girl will dream, perchance in twilit hours,
Or under eve's first star (when we are young
Happiness seems so possible — so near!
One says, "it must go hard, but I shall find it!")
Ofttimes I mused — "My life shall be my own,
To make it what I will." It is their fault
(I thought) who miss the true delights. I thought
Men might have saved themselves: they flung
away,
Too easily abasht, life's opening promise:
But all things will be different for me.
For I felt life so strong in me! indeed
I was so sure of my own power to love
And to enjoy — I had so much to give,
I said, "be sure it must win something back!"
Youth is so confident! And tho' I saw
All women sad — not only those I knew,
As Helen (whom from youth I knew, nor ever
Divined that sad impenetrable smile
Which oft would darken thro' her lustrous eyes,
As drawing slowly down o'er her cold cheek
The yellow braids of odorous hair, she turn'd
From Menelaüs praising her, and sigh'd —
That was before he, flinging bitterly down
The trampled parsley-crown and undrain'd goblet,
Curs'd before all the Gods his sudden shame
And young Hermione's deserted youth!)
Not only her — but all whose lives I learn'd,
Medea, Deianira, Ariadne,
And many others — all weak, wrong'd, opprest,
Or sick and sorrowful, as I am now —
Yet in their fate I would not see my own,
Nor grant allegiance to that general law

From which a few, I knew a very few,
With whom it seem'd I also might be numb'er'd,
Had yet escaped securely : — so exempting
From this world's desolation everywhere
One fate — my own!
Well, that was foolish! Now
I am not so exacting. As we move
Further and further down the path of fate
To the sure tomb, we yield up, one by one,
Our claims on Fortune, till with each new year
We seek less and go further to obtain it.
'Tis the old tale — aye, all of us must learn it!
But yet I would not empty-handed stand
Before the House of Hades. Still there's life,
And hope with life ; and much that may be done.
Look up, O thou most dear and cherisht head!
We'll strive still, conquering ; or, if falling, fall
In sight of grand results.

ÆGISTHUS.

May these things be!
I know not. All is vague. I should be strong
Even were you weak. 'Tis otherwise — I see
No path to safety sure. We have done ill things.
Best let the past be past, lest new griefs come.
Best we part now.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Part! what, to part from thee
Never till death — not in death even, part!

ÆGISTHUS.

But one course now is left.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And that is —

ÆGISTHUS.

Flight

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Coward!

ÆGISTHUS.

I care not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Flight! I am a Queen.
A goddess once you said — and why not goddess?
Seeing the Gods are mightier than we
By so much more of courage. Oh, not I,
But you, are mad.

ÆGISTHUS.

Nay, wiser than I was.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And you will leave me?

ÆGISTHUS.

Not if you will come.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

This was the Atlas of the world I built!

ÆGISTHUS.

Flight! . . . yes, I know not . . . somewhere . anywhere.
You come? . . . you come not? . . . well? . . . a time to pause!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And this is he — this he, the man I loved!
And this is retribution! O my heart!
O Agamemnon, how art thou avenged!
And I have done so much for him! . . . would do
So much! . . . a universe lies ruin'd here.
Now by Apollo, be a man for once!
Be for once strong, or be forever weak!

If shame be dead, and honour be no more,
No more true faith, nor that which in old time
Made us like Gods, sublime in our high place,
Yet all surviving instincts warn from flight.
Flight! — oh, impossible! Even now the steps
Of fate are at the threshold. Which way fly?
For every avenue is barr'd by death.
Will these not scout your flying heels? If now
They hate us powerful, will they love us weak?
No land is safe; nor any neighbouring king
Will harbour Agamemnon's enemy.
Reflect on Troy; her ashes smoulder yet.

ÆGISTHUS.

Her words compel me with their awful truth.
For so would vengeance hound and earth us down.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

If I am weak to move you by that love
You swore long since — and seal'd it with false lips! —
Yet lives there nothing of the ambitious will?
Of those proud plots, and dexterous policy,
On which you builded such high hopes, and swore
To rule this people Agamemnon rules;
Supplant him eminent on his own throne,
And push our power thro' Greece?

ÆGISTHUS.

The dream was great.
It was a dream. We dreamt it like a king.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, and shall so fulfil it — like a King!
Who talks of flight? For now, bethink you well,
If to live on, the byword of a world,
Be any gain, even such flight offers not.
Will long-arm'd Vengeance never find you out
When you have left the weapon in her hands?

Be bold, and meet her! Who forestall the bolts
Of heaven, the Gods deem worthy of the Gods.
Success is made the measure of our acts.
And, think Ægisthus, there has been one thought
Before us in the intervals of years,
Between us ever in the long dark nights,
When, lying all awake, we heard the wind.
Did you shrink then? or, only closer drawing
Your lips to mine, your arms about my neck,
Say, "Who would fear such chances, when he saw
Behind them such a prize for him as this?"
Do you shrink now? Dare you put all this from you?
Revoke the promise of those years, and say
This propect meets you unprepared at last?
Our motives are so mixt in their beginnings
And so confused, we recognize them not
Till they are grown to acts; but ne'er were ours
So blindly wov'n, but what we both untangled
Out of the intricacies of the heart
One purpose: — being found, best grapple to it.
For to conceive ill deeds yet dare not do them,
This is not virtue, but a twofold shame.
Between the culprit and the Demi-god
There's but one difference men regard — success.
The weakly-wicked shall be doubly damned!

ÆGISTHUS.

I am not weak .... what will you? .... oh, too weak
To bear this scorn! ... She is a godlike fiend
And hell and heaven seem meeting in her eyes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Those who on perilous ventures once embark
Should burn their ships, nor ever dream return.
Better, tho' all Olympus march'd on us,
To die like fallen Titans, scorning Heaven,
Than live like slaves in scorn of our own selves!

ÆGISTHUS.

We wait then? Good! and dare this desperate
chance.
And if we fall (as we, I think, must fall)
It is but some few sunny hours we lose,
Some few bright days. True! and a little less
Of life, or else of wrong a little more,
What's that? For one shade more or less the
night
Will scarce seem darker or lighter — the long
night!
We'll fall together, if we fall; and if —
Oh if we live! —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, that was noblier thought
Now you grow back into yourself, your true self
My King! my chosen! my glad careless help-
mate
In the old time! we shared its pleasant days
Royally, did we not? How brief they were!
Nor will I deem you less than what I know
You have it in you to become, for this
Strange freakish fear — this passing brief alarm
Do I not know the noble steed will start
Aside, scared lightly by a straw, a shadow,
A thorn-bush in the way, while the dull mule
Plods stupidly adown the dizziest paths?
And oft indeed, such trifles will dismay
The finest and most eager spirits, which yet
Daunt not a duller mind. O love, be sure
Whate'er betide, whether for well or ill,
Thy fate and mine are bound up in one skein
Clotho must cut them both inseparate.
You dare not leave me — had you wings for
flight!
You shall not leave me! You are mine, indeed,
(As I am yours!) by my strong right of grief.
Not death together, but together life!

Life — life with safe and honourable years,
And power to do with these that which we would!
— His lips comprest — his eye dilates — he is
saved!
O, when strong natures into frailer ones
Have struck deep root, if one exalt not both,
Both must drag down and perish!

ÆGISTHUS.

If we should live —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And we shall live.

ÆGISTHUS.

Yet . . . yet —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What! shrinking still?
I'll do the deed. Do not stand off from me.

ÆGISTHUS.

Terrible Spirit!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, not terrible,
Not to thee terrible — O say not so!
To thee I never have been anything
But a weak, passionate, unhappy woman
(O woe is me!) and now you fear me —

ÆGISTHUS.

No,
But rather worship.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O my heart, my heart,
It sends up all its anguish in this cry —
Love me a little!

ÆGISTHUS.

What a spell she has
To sway the inmost courses of the soul!
My spirit is held up to such a height
I dare not breathe. How finely sits this sorrow
Upon her, like the garment of a God!
I cannot fathom her. Does the same birth
Bring forth the monster and the demi-god?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I will not doubt! All's lost, if love be lost—
Peace, honour, innocence—gone, gone! all gone!
And you, too—you, poor baffled crownless schemer,
Whose life my love makes royal, clothes in purple,
Establishes in state, without me, answer me,
What should you do but perish, as is fit?
O love, you dare not cease to love me now!
We have let the world go by us. We have trusted
To ourselves only: if we fail ourselves
What shall avail us now? Without my love
What rests for you but universal hate,
And Agamemnon's sword? Ah, no—you love me,
Must love me, better than you ever loved—
Love me, I think, as you love life itself!
Ægisthus! Speak Ægisthus!

ÆGISTHUS.

O great heart
I am all yours. Do with me what you will.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, if you love me, I have strength for both.
And you do love me still?

ÆGISTHUS.

O more, thrice more,
Thrice more than wert thou Aphroditè's self
Stept zoned and sandal'd from the Olympian Feast
Or first reveal'd among the pink sea-foam.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Whate'er I am, be sure that I am that
Which thou hast made me — nothing of myself.
Once, all unheedful, careless of myself,
And wholly ignorant of what I was,
I grew up as a reed some wind will touch,
And wake to prophecy — till then all mute,
And void of melody — a foolish weed!
My soul was blind, and all my life was dark,
And all my heart pined with some ignorant want.
I moved about, a shadow in the house,
And felt unwedded though I was a wife;
And all the men and women which I saw
Were but as pictures painted on a wall:
To me they had not either heart, or brain,
Or lips, or language — pictures! nothing more.
Then, suddenly, athwart those lonely hours
Which, day by day dream'd listlessly away,
Led to the dark and melancholy tomb,
Thy presence passed and touch'd me with a soul.
My life did but begin when I found thee.
O what a strength was hidden in this heart!
As, all unvalued, in its cold dark cave
Under snow hills, some rare and priceless gem
May sparkle and burn, so in this life of mine
Love lay shut up. You broke the rock away,
You lit upon the jewel that it hid,
You pluck'd it forth — to wear it, my Belov'd!
To set in the crown of thy dear life!
To embellish fortune! Cast it not away.
Now call me by the old familiar names:
Call me again your Queen, as once you used;
Your large-eyed Herë!

ÆGISTHUS.

Oh, you are a Queen
That should have none but Gods to rule over!
Make me immortal with one costly kiss!

VIII. CHORUS. ELECTRA. CLYTEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CHORUS.

Io! Io! I hear the people shout.

ELECTRA.

See how these two do mutually confer,
Hatching new infamy. Now will he dare,
In his unbounded impudence, to meet
My father's eyes? The hour is nigh at hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O love, be bold! the hour is nigh at hand.

ELECTRA.

Laden with retribution, lingering slow.

ÆGISTHUS.

A time in travail with some great distress.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, rather safety for the rest of time.
O love! O hate!

ELECTRA.

O vengeance!

ÆGISTHUS.

O wild chance
If favouring fate—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Despair is more than fate.

CHORUS.

Io! Io! The King is on his march.

ÆGISTHUS.

Did you hear that?

ELECTRA.

The hour is nigh at hand!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Leave me to deal with these. I know the arts
That guide the doubtful purpose of discourse
Thro' many windings to the appointed goal.
I'll draw them on to such a frame of mind
As best befits our purpose. You, meanwhile,
Scatter vague words among the other crowd,
Lest the event, when it is due, fall foul
Of unpropitious natures.

ÆGISTHUS.

Do you fear
The helpless, blind ill-will of such a crowd?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He only fears mankind who knows them not.
But him I praise not who despises them.
Whence come, Electra?

ELECTRA.

From my father's hearth
To meet him; for the hour is nigh at hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So do our hopes race hotly to one end,
(A noble rivalry!) as who shall first
Embrace this happy fortune. Tarry not.
We too will follow.

ELECTRA.

Justice, O be swift!

IX CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS HERALD.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A froward child! She's gone. My blood's in her.
Her father's, too, looks out of that proud face.
She is too bold . . . ha, well — Ægisthus? . . gone!
O fate! to be a woman! You great Gods,
Why did you fashion me in this soft mould?
Give me these lengths of silky hair? These hands
Too delicately dimpled! and these arms
Too white, too weak! yet leave the man's heart in me,
To mar your masterpiece — that I should perish,
Who else had won renown among my peers,
A man, with men — perchance a god with you,
Had you but better sex'd me, you blind Gods!
But, as for man, all things are fitting to him.
He strikes his fellow 'mid the clanging shields,
And leaps among the smoking walls, and takes
Some long-hair'd virgin wailing at the shrines,
Her brethren having fallen; and you Gods
Commend him, crown him, grant him ample days,
And dying honour, and an endless peace
Among the deep Elysian asphodels.
O fate, to be a woman! To be led
Dumb, like a poor mule, at a master's will,
And be a slave, tho' bred in palaces,
And be a fool, tho' seated with the wise —
A poor and pitiful fool, as I am now,
Loving and hating my vain life away!

CHORUS.

These flowers — we pluck'd them

At morning, and took them
From bright bees that suck'd them
And warm winds that shook them
'Neath blue hills that o'erlook them.

SEMI-CHORUS.

With the dews of the meadow
Our rosy warm fingers
Sparkle yet, and the shadow
Of the summer-cloud lingers
In the hair of us singers.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Ere these buds on our altars
Fade; ere the forkt fire,
Fed with pure honey falters,
And fails; louder, higher
Raise the Pæan.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Draw nigher,
Stand closer! First praise we
The Father of all.
To him the song raise we.
Over Heaven's golden wall
Let it fall! Let it fall!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Then Apollo, the king of
The lyre and the bow;
Who taught us to sing of
The deeds that we know —
Deeds well done long ago.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Next, of all the Immortals,
Athenë's gray eyes;
Who sits throned in our portals,
Ever fair, ever wise.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Neither dare we despise
To extol the great Herë.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

And then,
As is due, shall our song
Be of those among men
Who were brave, who were strong,
Who endured.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Then, the wrong
Of the Phrygian: and Ilion's false sons:
And Scamander's wild wave
Thro' the bleak plain that runs.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Then, the death of the brave.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Last, of whom the Gods save
For new honours: of them none
So good or so great
As our chief Agamemnon
The crown of our State.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O friends, true hearts, rejoice with me! This day
Shall crown the hope of ten uncertain years!

CHORUS.

For Agamemnon cannot be far off —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He comes — and yet — O Heaven preserve us all!
My heart is weak — there's One he brings not back;

Who went with him; who will not come again;
Whom we shall never see! —

CHORUS.

O Queen, for whom,
Lamenting thus, is your great heart cast down?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The earliest loved — the early lost! my child —

CHORUS.

Iphigenia?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

She — my child —

CHORUS.

— Alas!
That was a terrible necessity!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Was it necessity? O pardon, friends,
But in the dark, unsolaced solitude,
Wild thoughts come to me, and perplex my heart.
This, which you call a dread necessity,
Was it a murder or a sacrifice?

CHORUS.

It was a God that did decree the death.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis through the heart the Gods do speak to us.
High instincts are the oracles of heaven.
Did ever heart — did ever God, before,
Suggest such foul infanticidal lie?

CHORUS.

Be comforted! The universal good
Needed this single, individual loss.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Can all men's good be helped by one man's crime?

CHORUS.

He loosed the Greeks from Aulis by that deed.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O casual argument! Who gave the Greeks
Such bloody claim upon a virgin's life?
Shall the pure bleed to purge impurity?
A hundred Helens were not worth that death!
What! had the manhood of combinéd Greece,
Whose boast was in its untamed strength, no help
Better than the spilt blood of one poor girl?
Or, if it were of need that blood should flow,
What God ordain'd him executioner?
Was it for him the Armament was plann'd?
For him that angry Greece was leagued in war?
For him, or Menelaus, was this done?
Was the cause his, or Menelaus' cause?
Was he less sire than Menelaus was?
He, too, had children; did he murder them?
O, was it manlike? was it human, even?

CHORUS.

Alas! alas! it was an evil thing.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O friends, if any one among you all,
If any be a mother, bear with me!
She was my earliest born, my best beloved
The painful labour of that perilous birth
That gave her life did almost take my own.
He had no pain. He did not bring her forth.
How should he, therefore, love her as I loved

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! alas! Our tears run down with y[illegible]

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, who shall say with what delicious tears,
With what ineffable tenderness, while he
Took his blithe pastime on the windy plain,
Among the ringing camps, and neighing steeds,
First of his glad compeers, I sat apart,
Silent, within the solitary house:
Rocking the little child upon my breast;
And soothed its soft eyes into sleep with song!

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! unhappy, sad, unchilded one!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Or, when I taught, from inarticulate sounds,
The little, lisping, lips, to breathe his name.
Now they will never breathe that name again!

CHORUS.

Alas! for Hades has not any hope,
Since Thracian women lopp'd the tuneful head
Of Orpheus, and Heracleus is no more.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Or, spread in prayer the helpless, infant hands,
That they, too, might invoke the gods for him.
Alas, who now invokes the Gods for her?
Unwedded, hapless, gone to glut the womb
Of dark, untimely Orcus!

CHORUS.

Ai! alas!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I would have died, if that could be, for her!
When life is half-way set to feeble eld,
And memory more than hope, and to dim eyes
The gorgeous tapestry of existence shows
Moth'd, finger'd, fray'd, and bare, 'twere not so hard

To fling away this ravell'd skein of life,
Which else, a little later, Fate had cut.
And who would sorrow for the o'erblown rose
Sharp winter strews about its own bleak thorns?
But, cropp'd before the time, to fall so young!
And wither in the gloomy crown of Dis!
Never to look upon the blessed sun —

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! alinon! woe is me, this grief
Strikes pity paralyzed. All words are weak!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And I had dreamed such splendid dreams for her!
Who would not so for Agamemnon's child?
For we had hoped that she, too, in her time
Would be the mother of heroic men!

CHORUS.

There rises in my heart an awful fear,
Lest from these evils darker evils come;
For heaven exacts, for wrong, the uttermost tear,
And death hath language after life is dumb!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

It works! it works!

CHORUS.

Look, some one comes this way

HERALD.

O Honour of the House of Tantalus!
The king's wheels echo in the brazen gates.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Our heart is half-way there, to welcome him.
How looks he? Well? And all our long-lost friends —

Their faces grow before me! Lead the way
Where we may meet them. All our haste seems
slow.

CHORUS.

Would that he brought his dead child back with
him!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now let him come. The mischief works apace!

X. CHORUS.

CHORUS.

The winds were lull'd in Aulis; and the day,
Down-sloped, was loitering to the lazy west.
There was no motion of the glassy bay,
But all things by a heavy light opprest.
Windless, cut off from the destined way —
Dark shrouds, distinct against the lurid lull —
Dark ropes hung useless, loose, from mast to
hull —
The black ships lay abreast.
Not any cloud would cross the brooding skies.
The distant sea boom'd faintly. Nothing more.
They walked about upon the yellow shore;
Or, lying listless, huddled groups supine,
With faces turn'd toward the flat sea-spine,
They plann'd the Phrygian battle o'er, and o'er;
Till each grew sullen, and would talk no more,
But sat, dumb-dreaming. Then would some one
rise,
And look toward the hollow hulls, with haggard,
hopeless eyes —
Wild eyes — and, crowding round, yet wilder
eyes —
And gaping, languid lips;
And everywhere that men could see,

CLYTEMNESTRA.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

AGAMEMNON.	CLYTEMNESTRA.
ÆGISTHUS.	ELECTRA.
ORESTES.	CASSANDRA.
PHOCIAN.	CHORUS.
HERALD.	

SCENE. — *Before the Palace of Agamemnon in Argos. Trophies, amongst which, the shield of Agamemnon, on the wall.*

Time, *Morning.* *The action continues till Sunset.*

I. CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

MORNING at last! at last the lingering day
Creeps o'er the dewy side of yon dark world.
O dawning light already on the hills!
O universal earth, and air, and thou,
First freshness of the east, which art a breath
Breath'd from the rapture of the gods, who bless
Almost all other prayers on earth but mine!
Wherefore to me is solacing sleep denied?
And honourable rest, the right of all?
So that no medicine of the slumbrous shell,
Brimm'd with divinest draughts of melody,
Nor silence under dreamful canopies,

Nor purple cushions of the lofty couch
May lull this fever for a little while.
Wherefore to me — to me, of all mankind,
This retribution for a deed undone?
For many men outlive their sum of crimes,
And eat, and drink, and lift up thankful hands,
And take their rest securely in the dark.
Am I not innocent — or more than these?
There is no blot of murder on my brow,
Nor any taint of blood upon my robe.
— It is the thought! it is the thought! . . . and men
Judge us by acts! . . as tho' one thunder-clap
Let all Olympus out. Unquiet heart,
Ill fares it with thee since, ten sad years past,
In one wild hour of unacquainted joy
Thou didst set wide thy lonely bridal doors
For a forbidden guest to enter in!
Last night, methought pale Helen, with a frown,
Swept by me, murmuring, "I — such as thou —
A Queen in Greece — weak-hearted (woe is me!)
Allured by love — did, in an evil hour,
Fall off from duty. Sorrow came. Beware!"
And then, in sleep, there pass'd a baleful band —
The ghosts of all the slaughter'd under Troy,
From this side Styx, who cried, "For such a crime
"We fell from our fair palaces on earth,
"And wander, starless, here. For such a crime
"A thousand ships were launch'd, and tumbled down
'The topless towers of Ilion, tho' they rose
'To magic music, in the time of Gods!"
With such fierce thoughts for evermore at war,
Vext not alone by hankering wild regrets
But fears, yet worse, of that which soon must come,
My heart waits arm'd, and from the citadel
Of its high sorrow, sees far off dark shapes,

And hears the footsteps of Necessity
Tread near, and nearer, hand in hand with Woe.
Last night the flaming Herald warning urged
Up all the hills — small time to pause and plan!
Counsel is weak: and much remains to do,
That Agamemnon, and, if else remain
Of that enduring band who sail'd for Troy
Ten years ago (and some sail'd Lethe-ward),
Find us not unprepared for their return.

But — hark! I hear the tread of nimble feet
That sound this way. The rising town is pour'd
About the festive altars of the Gods,
And from the heart of the great Agora,
Lets out its gladness for this last night's news.
— Ah, so it is! Insidious, sly Report,
Sounding oblique, like Loxian oracles,
Tells double-tongued (and with the self-same voice!)
To some new gladness, new despair to some.

II. CHORUS AND CLYTEMNESTRA.

CHORUS.

O dearest Lady, daughter of Tyndarus!
With purple flowers we come, and offerings —
Oil, and wine; and cakes of honey,
Soothing, unadulterate; tapestries
Woven by white Argive maidens,
God-descended (woven only
For the homeward feet of Heroes)
To celebrate this glad intelligence
Which last night the fiery courier
Brought us, posting up from Ilion,
Wheel'd above the dusky circle
Of the hills from lighted Ida.
For now (Troy lying extinguisht
Underneath a mighty Woe)

Our King and chief of men,
Agamemnon, returning
(And with him the hope of Argos),
Shall worship at the Tutelary Altars
Of their dear native land:
In the Fane of ancient Herë,
Or the great Lycæan God;
Immortally crown'd with reverend honour!
But tell us wherefore, O godlike woman,
Having a lofty trouble in your eye,
You walk alone with loosened tresses?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Shall the ship toss, and yet the helm not heave?
Shall they drowse sitting at the lower oars,
When those that hold the middle benches wake?
He that is yet sole eye of all our state
Shining not here, shall ours be shut in dreams?
But haply you (thrice happy!) prove not this,
The curse of Queens, and worse than widow'd wives —
To wake, and hear, all night, the wandering gnat
Sing thro' the silent chambers, while Alarm,
In place of Slumber, by the haunted couch
Stands sentinel; or when from coast to coast
Wails the night-wandering wind, or when o'er heaven
Boötes hath unleash'd his fiery hounds,
And Night her glittering camps hath set, and lit
Her watch-fires thro' the silence of the skies,
— To count ill chances in the dark, and feel
Deserted pillows wet with tears, not kisses,
Where kisses once fell.
But now Expectation
Stirs up such restless motions of the blood
As suffer not my lids to harbour sleep.
Wherefore, O belov'd companions,

I wake betimes, and wander up and down,
Looking toward the distant hill-tops,
From whence shall issue fair fulfilment
Of all our ten-years' hoping. For, behold!
Troy being captiv'd, we shall see once more
Those whom we loved in days of old.
Yet some will come not from the Phrygian shore,
But there lie weltering to the surf and wind;
Exil'd from day, in darkness blind,
Or having crost unhappy Styx.
And some who left us full of vigorous youth
Shall greet us now gray-headed men.
But if our eyes behold again
Our long-expected chief, in truth,
Fortune for us hath thrown the Treble Six.

CHORUS.

By us, indeed, these things are also wisht.
Wherefore, if now to this great son of Atreus
(Having surviv'd the woful walls of Troy),
With us, once more, the Gods permit to stand
A glad man by the pillars of his hearth,
Let his dear life henceforth be such wherein
The Third Libation often shall be pour'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And let his place be number'd with the Gods,
Who overlook the world's eternal walls,
Out of all reach of sad calamities.

CHORUS.

It is not well, I think, that men should set
Too near the Gods any of mortal kind:
But brave men are as Gods upon the earth.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And whom Death daunts not, these are truly brave.

CHORUS.

But more than all I reckon that man blest,
Who, having sought Death nobly, finds it not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Except he find it where he does not seek.

CHORUS.

You speak in riddles.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

For so Wisdom speaks.
But now do you with garlands wreathe the altars,
While I, within, the House prepare.
That so our King, at his returning,
With his golden Armament,
Find us not unaware
Of the greatness of the event.

CHORUS.

Soon shall we see the faces that we loved.
Brother once more clasping brother,
As in the unforgotten days:
And heroes, meeting one another
(Men by glorious toils approved)
Where once they roved,
Shall rove again the old familiar ways.
And they that from the distance come
Shall feed their hearts with tales of home;
And tell the famous story of the war,
Rumour'd sometime from afar.
Now shall these again behold
The ancient Argos; and the grove
Long since trod
By the frenzied child of Inachus;
And the Forum, famed of old,
Of the wolf-destroying God;
And the opulent Mycenæ,

Home of the Pelopidæ,
While they rove with those they love,
Holding pleasant talk with us.
O how gloriously they went,
That avenging Armament!
As tho' Olympus in her womb
No longer did entomb
The greatness of a bygone world —
Gods and godlike men —
But cast them forth again
To frighten Troy: such storm was hurl'd
On her devoted towers
By the retributive Deity,
Whosoe'er he be
Of the Immortal Powers —
Or mad'ning Pan, if he chastise
His Shepherd's Phrygian treacheries;
Or vengeful Loxias; or Zeus,
Anger'd for the shame and abuse
Of a great man's hospitality.

As wide as is Olympus' span
Is the power of the high Gods;
Who, in their golden blest abodes
See all things, looking from the sky;
And Heaven is hard to pacify
For the wickedness of man.
My heart is fill'd with vague forebodings,
And opprest by unknown terrors
Lest, in the light of so much gladness,
Rise the shadow of ancient wrong.
O Dæmon of the double lineage
Of Tantalus; and the Pleisthenidæ,
Inexorable in thy mood,
On the venerable threshold
Of the ancient House of Pelops
Surely is enough of blood!
Wherefore does my heart misgive me?
Wherefore comes this doubt to grieve me?

O, may no Divine Envy
Follow home the Argive army,
Being vext for things ill-done
In wilful pride of stubborn war,
Long since, in the distant lands!
May no Immortal wrath pursue
Our dear King, the Light of Argos,
For the unhappy sacrifice
Of a daughter; working evil
In the dark heart of a woman;
Or some household treachery,
And a curse from kindred hands!

III. CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

[Reëntering from the house.

To-morrow . . . ay, what if to-day? . . . Well — then?
Why, if those tongues of flame, with which last night
The land was eloquent, spoke certain truth,
By this perchance thro' green Saronic rocks
Those black ships glide . . . perchance . . . well, what's to fear?
'Twere well to dare the worst — to know the end —
Die, soon, or live secure. What's left to add
To years of nights like those which I have known?
Shall I shrink now to meet one little hour
Which I have dared to contemplate for years?
By all the Gods, not so! The end crowns all,
Which if we fail to seize, that's also lost
Which went before: as who would lead a host
Thro' desolate dry places, yet return

In sight of kingdoms, when the Gods are roused
To mark the issue? . . . And yet, yet —
I think
Three nights ago there must have been sea-storms.
The wind was wild among the Palace towers:
Far off upon the hideous Element
I know it huddled up the petulant waves,
Whose shapeless and bewildering precipices
Led to the belly of Orcus . . . oh, to slip
Into dark Lethe from a dizzy plank,
When even the Gods are reeling on the poop!
To drown at night, and have no sepulchre! —
That were too horrible! . . . yet it may be
Some easy chance, that comes with little pain,
Might rid me of the haunting of those eyes,
And these wild thoughts . . . To know he roved among
His old companions in the Happy Fields,
And ranged with heroes — I still innocent!
Sleep would be natural then.
Yet will the old time
Never return! never those peaceful hours!
Never that careless heart! and nevermore,
Ah, nevermore that laughter without pain!
But I, that languish for repose, must fly it,
Nor, save in daring, doing, taste of rest.
Oh to have lost all these! To have barter'd calm,
And all the irrevocable wealth of youth,
And gain'd . . . what? But this change hac surely come,
Even were all things other than they are.
I blame myself o'ermuch, who should blame time,
And life's inevitable loss, and fate,
And days grown lovelier in the retrospect.
We change: wherefore look back? The path to safety
Lies forward . . . forward ever.

[*In passing toward the house she recognizes the shield of Agamemnon, and pauses before it.*

Ha! old shield,
Hide up for shame that honest face of thine.
Stare not so bluntly at us . . . Oh, this man!
Why sticks the thought of him so in my heart?
If I had loved him once — if for one hour —
Then were there treason in this falling off.
But never did I feel this wretched heart
Until it leap'd beneath Ægisthus' eyes.
Who could have so forecounted all from first?
From that flusht moment when his hand in mine
Rested a thought too long, a touch too kind,
To leave its pulse unwarm'd . . . but I remember
I dream'd sweet dreams that night, and slept till dawn,
And woke with flutterings of a happy thought,
And felt, not worse, but better . . . and now . . . now?
When first a strange and novel tenderness
Quiver'd in these salt eyes, had one said then
"A bead of dew may drag a deluge down:" —
In that first pensive pause, through which I watch'd
Unwonted sadness on Ægisthus' brows,
Had some one whisper'd, "Ay, the summer-cloud
Comes first: the tempest follows." —
Well, what's past
Is past. Perchance the worst's to follow yet.
How thou art hackt, and hewn, and bruis'd, old shield!
Was the whole edge of the war against one man?
But one thrust more upon this dexter ridge
Had quite cut thro' the double inmost hide.
He must have stood to it well! Oh, he was cast
I' the mould of Titans: a magnificent man,
With head and shoulders like a God's. He seem'd
Too brimful of this merry vigorous life
To spill it all out at one stab o' the sword.

Yet that had help'd much ill . . . oh Destiny
Makes cowards or makes culprits of us all!
Ah, had some Trojan weapon . . . Fool! fool! fool!
Surely sometimes the unseen Eumenides
Do prompt our musing moods with wicked hints,
And lash us for our crimes ere we commit them.
Here, round this silver boss, he cut my name,
Once — long ago: he cut it as he lay
Tired out with brawling pastimes — prone — his limbs
At length diffused — his head droopt in my lap —
His spear flung by: Electra by the hearth
Sat with the young Orestes on her knee;
While he, with an old broken sword, hack'd out
These crooked characters, and laugh'd to see
(Sprawl'd from the unused strength of his large hands)
The marks make CLYTEMNESTRA.
How he laugh'd!
Ægisthus' hands are smaller.
Yet I know
That matrons envied me my husband's strength.
And I remember when he strode among
The Argive crowd he topp'd them by a head,
And tall men stood wide-eyed to look at him,
Where his great plumes went tossing up and down
The brazen prores drawn out upon the sand.
War on his front was graved, as on thy disk,
Shield! which he left to keep his memory
Grand in men's mouths: that some revered old man,
Winning to this the eyes of our hot youth,
Might say, "'Twas here, and here — this dent, and that —
On such, and such a field (which we remember)
That Agamemnon, in the great old time,
Held up the Battle."

Now lie there, and rust!
Thy uses all have end. Thy master's home
Should harbour none but friends.
O triple brass,
Iron, and oak! the blows of blundering men
Clang idly on you: what fool's strength is yours
For, surely, not the adamantine tunic
Of Ares, nor whole shells of blazing plates,
Nor ashen spear, nor all the cumbrous coil
Of seven bull's hides may guard the strongest king
From one defenceless woman's quiet hate.

What noise was that? Where can Ægisthus be?
Ægisthus! — my Ægisthus! . . . There again!
Louder, and longer — from the Agora —
A mighty shout: and now I see i' the air
A rolling dust the wind blows near. Ægisthus!
O much I fear . . . this wild-will'd race of ours
Doth ever, like a young unbroken colt,
Chafe at the straighten'd bridle of our state —
If they should find him lone, irresolute,
As is his wont . . . I know he lacks the eye
And forehead wherewith crown'd Capacity
Awes rash Rebellion back.
Again that shout!
Gods keep Ægisthus safe! myself will front
This novel storm. How my heart leaps to danger!
I have been so long a pilot on rough seas,
And almost rudderless!
O yet 'tis much
To feel a power, self-centred, self-assured,
Bridling a glorious danger! as when one
That knows the nature of the elements
Guides some frail plank with sublime skill that wins
Progress from all obstruction; and, erect,

Looks bold and free down all the dripping stars,
Hearing the hungry storm boom baffled, by.
Ægisthus! . . . hark! . . . Ægisthus! . . . there . . .
Ægisthus!
I would to all the Gods I knew him safe!
Who comes this way, guiding his racing feet
Safe to us, like a nimble charioteer?

IV. CLYTEMNESTRA. HERALD.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now, gloom-bird! are there prodigies about?
What new ill-thing sent thee before?

HERALD.

O Queen —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Speak, if thou hast a voice! I listen.

HERALD.

O Queen —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hath an ox trodden on thy tongue? . . . Speak then!

HERALD.

O Queen (for haste hath caught away my breath),
The King is coming.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Say again — the King
Is coming —

HERALD.

Even now, the broad sea-fields

Grow white with flocks of sails, and toward the west
The sloped horizon teems with rising beaks.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The people know this?

HERALD.

Heard you not the noise?
For soon as this wing'd news had toucht the gate
The whole land shouted in the sun.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So soon!
The thought's outsped by the reality,
And halts agape . . . the King —

HERALD.

How she is moved
A noble woman!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Wherefore beat so fast,
Thou foolish heart? 'tis not thy master —

HERALD.

Truly
She looks all over Agamemnon's mate.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Destiny, Destiny! The deed's half done.

HERALD

She will not speak, save by that brooding eye
Whose light is language. Some great thought, I see,
Mounts up the royal chambers of her blood,
As a king mounts his palace; holds high pomp
In her Olympian bosom; gains her face,

Possesses all her noble glowing cheek
With sudden state; and gathers grandly up
Its slow majestic meanings in her eyes!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So quick this sudden joy hath taken us,
I scarce can realize the sum of it.
You say the King comes here — the King, my husband,
Whom we have waited for ten years — O joy!
Pardon our seeming roughness at the first.
Hope, that will often fawn upon despair
And flatter desperate chances, when the event
Falls at our feet, soon takes a querulous tone,
And jealous of that perfect joy she guards
(Lest the ambrosial fruit by some rude hand
Be stol'n away from her, and never tasted),
Barks like a lean watch-dog at all who come.
But now do you, with what good speed you may,
Make known this glad intelligence to all.
Ourselves, within, as best befits a wife
And woman, will prepare my husband's house.
Also, I pray you, summon to our side
Our cousin, Ægisthus. We would speak with him.
We would that our own lips should be the first
To break these tidings to him; so obtaining
New joy by sharing his. And, for yourself,
Receive our gratitude. For this great news
Henceforth you hold our royal love in fee.
Our fairest fortunes from this day I date,
And to the House of Tantalus new honour.

HERALD.

She's gone! With what a majesty she fill'd
The whole of space! The statues of the Gods
Are not so godlike. She has Herë's eyes,
And looks immortal!

V. CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*as she ascends the steps of the Palace*).

So . . . while on the verge
Of some wild purpose we hang dizzily,
Weighing the danger of the leap below
Against the danger of retreating steps,
Upon a sudden, some forecast event,
Issuing full-arm'd from Councils of the Gods,
Strides to us, plucks us by the hair, and hurls
Headlong pale conscience, to the abyss of crime.
Well — I shrink not. 'Tis but a leap in life.
There's fate in this. Why is he here so soon?
The sight of whose abhorréd eyes will add
Whatever lacks of strength to this resolve.
Away with shame! I have had enough of it.
What's here for shame? . . . the weak against the strong?
And if the weak be victor? . . . what of that?
Tush! . . . there — my soul is set to it. What need
Of argument to justify an act
Necessity compels, and must absolve?
I have been at play with scruples — like a girl.
Now they are all flung by. I have talk'd with Crime
Too long to play the prude. These thoughts have been
Wild guests by night. Now I shall dare to do
That which I did not dare to think . . . oh, now know myself! Crime's easier than we dream.

CHORUS.

Upon the everlasting hills
Thronéd Justice works, and waits.
Between the shooting of a star,
That falls unseen on summer nights
Out of the bosom of the dark,

And the magnificent march of War,
Roll'd from angry lands afar
Round some dooméd city-gates,
Nothing is to her unknown;

Nothing unseen.
Upon her hills she sits alone,
And in the balance of Eternity
Poises against the What-has-been
The weight of What-shall-be.
She sums the account of human ills.
The great world's hoarded wrongs and rights
Are in her treasures. She will mark,
With inward-searching eyes sublime,
The frauds of Time.
The empty future years she fills
Out of the past. All human wills
Sway to her on her reachless heights.

Wisdom she teaches men, with tears,
In the toilful school of years:
Climbing from event to event.
And, being patient, is content
To stretch her sightless arms about,
And find some human instrument,
From many sorrows to work out
Her doubtful, far, accomplishment.

She the two Atridæ sent
Upon Ilion: being intent
The heapt-up wrath of Heaven to move
Against the faithless Phrygian crime.
Them the Thunder-bird of Jove,
Swooping sudden from above,
Summon'd to fates sublime.

She, being injured, for the sake
Of her, the often-wedded wife
(Too loved, and too adoring!)

Many a brazen band did break
In many a breathless battle-strife;
Many a noble life did take;
Many a headlong agony,
Frenzied shout, and frantic cry,
For Greek and Trojan storing.
When, the spear in the onset being shiver'd,
The reeling ranks were roll'd together
Like mad waves mingling in windy weather,
Dasht fearfully over and over each other.
And the plumes of Princes were toss'd and thrust,
And dragg'd about in the shameful dust;
And the painful, panting breath
Came and went in the tug of death:
And the sinews were loosen'd, and the strong knees stricken:
And the eyes began to darken and thicken:
And the arm of the mighty and terrible quiver'd.

O Love! Love! Love! How terrible art thou!
How terrible!
Oh, what hast thou to do
With men of mortal years,
Who toil below,
And have enough of griefs for tears to flow?
Oh, range in higher spheres!
Hast thou, O hast thou, no diviner hues
To paint thy wings, but must transfuse
An Iris-light from tears?
For human hearts are all too weak to hold thee.
And how, O Love, shall human arms enfold thee?
There is a seal of sorrow on thy brow.
There is a deadly fire in thy breath.
With life thou lurest, yet thou givest death.
O Love, the Gods are weak by reason of thee;
And many wars have been upon the earth.
Thou art the sweetest source of saltest sorrows.
Thy blest to-days bring such unblest to-morrows;

Thy softest hope makes saddest memory.
Thou hadst destruction in thee from the birth;
Incomprehensible!

O Love, thy brightest bridal garments
Are poison'd, like that robe of agonies
Which Deianira wove for Hercules,
And, being put on, turn presently to cerements!

Thou art unconquered in the fight.
Thou rangest over land and sea.
O let the foolish nations be!
Keep thy divine desire
To upheave mountains or to kindle fire
From the frore frost, and set the world alight.
Why make thy red couch in the damask cheek?
Or light thy torch at languid eyes?
Or lie entangled in soft sighs
On pensive lips that will not speak?
To sow the seeds of evil things
In the hearts of headstrong kings?
Preparing many a kindred strife
For the fearful future hour?
O leave the wretched race of man,
Whose days are but the dying seasons' span;
Vex not his painful life!
Make thy immortal sport
In Heaven's high court,
And cope with Gods that are of equal power.

VI. ELECTRA CHORUS. CLYTEMNESTRA.

ELECTRA.

Now is at hand the hour of retribution.
For my father, at last returning,
In great power, being greatly injur'd,
Will destroy the base adulterer,
And efface the shameful Past.

CHORUS.

O child of the Godlike Agamemnon!
Leave vengeance to the power of Heaven,
Nor forestall with impious footsteps
The brazen tread of black Erinnys.

ELECTRA.

Is it, besotted with the adulterous sin,
Or, as with flattery pleasing present power
Or, being intimidate, you speak these words

CHORUS.

Nay, but desiring justice, like yourself.

ELECTRA.

Yet Justice ofttimes uses mortal means.

CHORUS.

But flings aside her tools when work is done

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O dearest friends, inform me, went this way
Ægisthus?

CHORUS.

Even now, hurrying hitherward
I see him walk, with irritated eyes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A reed may show which way the tempest blows
That face is pale — those brows are dark . . . all

VII. ÆGISTHUS. CLYTEMNESTRA.

ÆGISTHUS.

Agamemnon —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My husband . . . well?

ÆGISTHUS.

(Whom may the great Gods curse!)
Is scarce an hour hence.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Then that hour's yet saved
From sorrow. Smile, Ægisthus —

ÆGISTHUS.

Hear me speak.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not as your later wont has been to smile —
Quick, fierce, as tho' you scarce could hurry out
The wild thing fast enough; for smiling's sake,
As if to show you could smile, tho' in fear
Of what might follow — but as first you smiled
Years, years ago, when some slow loving thought
Stole down your face, and settled on your lips,
As tho' a sunbeam halted on a rose
And mix'd with fragrance, light. Can you smile still
Just so, Ægisthus?

ÆGISTHUS.

These are idle words,
And like the wanderings of some fever'd brain:
Extravagant phrases, void of import, wild.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, no! you cannot smile so, more. Nor I!

ÆGISTHUS.

Hark! in an hour the King —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hush! listen now —
I hear, far down yon vale, a shepherd piping
Hard by his milk-white flock. The lazy things!

How quietly they sleep or feed among
The dry grass and the acanthus there! . . . and he,
He hath flung his faun-skin by, and white ash-stick,
You hear his hymn? Something of Dryope,
Faunus, and Pan . . . an old wood tale, no doubt!
It makes me think of songs when I was young
I used to sing between the valleys there,
Or higher up among the red ash-berries,
Where the goats climb, and gaze. Do you remember
That evening when we linger'd all alone,
Below the city, and one yellow star
Shook o'er yon temple? . . . ah, and you said then
"Sweet, should this evening never change to night,
But pause, and pause, and stay just so — yon star
Still steadfast — and the moon behind the hill,
Still rising, never risen — would this seem strange?
Or should we say, 'why halts the day so late?'"
Do you remember?

ÆGISTHUS.

Woman! woman! this
Surpasses frenzy! Not a breath of time
Between us and the clutch of Destiny —
Already sound there footsteps at our heels,
Already comes a heat against our cheek,
Already fingers cold among our hair,
And you speak lightly thus, as tho' the day
Linger'd toward nuptial hours! . . . awake arouse!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I do wake . . . well, the King —

ÆGISTHUS.

Even while we speak
Draws near. And we —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Must meet him.

ÆGISTHUS.

Meet? ay . . . how?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

As mortals should meet fortune — calmly

ÆGISTHUS.

Quick!
Consult! consult! Yet there is time to choose
The path to follow.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I have chosen it
Long since.

ÆGISTHUS

How? —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, have we not had ten years
To ripen counsel, and mature resolve?
What's to add now?

ÆGISTHUS.

I comprehend you not.
The time is plucking at our sleeve.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ægisthus.
There shall be time for deeds, and soon enough,
Let that come when it may. And it may be
Deeds must be done shall shut and shrivel up

All quiet thoughts, and quite preclude repose
To the end of time. Upon this awful strait
And promontory of our mortal life
We stand between what was, and is not yet.
The Gods allot to us a little space,
Before the contests which must soon begin,
For calmer breathing. All before lies dark
And difficult, and perilous, and strange;
And all behind . . . What if we take one look,
One last long lingering look (before Despair,
The shadow of failure, or remorse, which often
Waits on success, can come 'twixt us and it,
And darken all) at that which yet must seem
Undimm'd in the long retrospect of years —
The beautiful imperishable Past!
Were this not natural, being innocent now
— At least of that which is the greater crime?
To-night we shall not be so.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ah, to-night!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

All will be done which now the Gods foresee.
The sun shines still.

ÆGISTHUS.

I oft have mark'd some day
Begin all gold in its flusht orient,
With splendid promise to the waiting world,
And turn to blackness ere the sun ran down.
So draws our love to its dark close. To-night —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Shall bring our bridals, my Belov'd! For, either
Upon the melancholy shores of Death
(One shadow near the doors of Pluto) greeted
By pale Proserpina, our steps shall be,
Or else, secure, in the great empty palace

We shall sleep crown'd — no noise to startle us —
And Argos silent round us — all our own!

ÆGISTHUS.

In truth I do not dare to think this thing.
For all the Greeks will hate us.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What of that?
If that they do not harm us — as who shall?

ÆGISTHUS.

Moreover, tho' we triumph in the act
(And we may fail, and fall) we shall go down
Cover'd with this reproach into the tomb,
Hunted by all the red Eumenides;
And, in the end, the ghost of him we slew,
Being beforehand there, will come between
Us and the awful Judges of the dead!
And no one on this earth will pray for us;
And no hand will hang garlands on our urns,
Either of man, or maid, or little child;
But we shall be dishonour'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O faint heart!
When this poor life of ours is done with — all
Its foolish days put by — its bright and dark —
Its praise and blame — roll'd quite away — gone o'er
Like some brief pageant — will it stir us more,
Where we are gone, how men may hoot or shout
After our footsteps, than the dust and garlands
A few mad boys and girls fling in the air
When a great host is pass'd, can cheer or vex
The minds of men already out of sight
Toward other lands, with pæan and with pomp
Array'd near vaster forces? For the future,
We will smoke hecatombs, and build new fanes,

And be you sure the gods deal leniently
With those who grapple for their life, and pluck it
From the closed grip of Fate, albeit perchance
Some ugly smutch, some drop of blood or so,
A spot here, there a streak, or stain of gore,
Should in the contest fall to them, and mar
That life's original whiteness.

ÆGISTHUS.

Tombs have tongues
That talk in Hades. Think it! Dare we hope,
This done, to be more happy?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My Belov'd,
We are not happy — we may never be,
Perchance, again. Yet it is much to think
We have been so: and ev'n tho' we must weep,
We have enjoy'd.
The roses and the thorns
We have pluckt together. We have proved both
Say,
Was it not worth the bleeding hands they left us
To have won such flowers? And if 'twere possible
To keep them still — keep even the wither'd leaves
Even the wither'd leaves are worth our care.
We will not tamely give up life — such life!
What tho' the years before, like those behind,
Be dark as clouds the thunder sits among,
Tipt only here and there with a wan gold
More bright for rains between? — 'tis much — 'tis
more,
For we shall ever think "the sun's behind.
The sun must shine before the day goes down!"
Anything better than the long, long night,
And that perpetual silence of the tomb!
'Tis not for happier hours, but life itself
Which may bring happier hours, we strike at Fate
Why, tho' from all the treasury of the Past

'Tis but one solitary gem we save —
One kiss more such as we have kist, one smile,
One more embrace, one night more such as those
Which we have shared, how costly were the prize,
How richly worth the attempt! Indeed, I know,
When yet a child, in those dim pleasant dreams
A girl will dream, perchance in twilit hours,
Or under eve's first star (when we are young
Happiness seems so possible — so near!
One says, " it must go hard, but I shall find it!")
Ofttimes I mused — " My life shall be my own,
To make it what I will." It is their fault
(I thought) who miss the true delights. I thought
Men might have saved themselves: they flung
away,
Too easily abasht, life's opening promise:
But all things will be different for me.
For I felt life so strong in me! indeed
I was so sure of my own power to love
And to enjoy — I had so much to give,
I said, " be sure it must win something back!"
Youth is so confident! And tho' I saw
All women sad — not only those I knew,
As Helen (whom from youth I knew, nor ever
Divined that sad impenetrable smile
Which oft would darken thro' her lustrous eyes,
As drawing slowly down o'er her cold cheek
The yellow braids of odorous hair, she turn'd
From Menelaüs praising her, and sigh'd —
That was before he, flinging bitterly down
The trampled parsley-crown and undrain'd goblet,
Curs'd before all the Gods his sudden shame
And young Hermione's deserted youth!)
Not only her — but all whose lives I learn'd,
Medea, Deianira, Ariadne,
And many others — all weak, wrong'd, opprest,
Or sick and sorrowful, as I am now —
Yet in their fate I would not see my own,
Nor grant allegiance to that general law

From which a few, I knew a very few,
With whom it seem'd I also might be numbered,
Had yet escaped securely : — so exempting
From this world's desolation everywhere
One fate — my own!
Well, that was foolish! Now
I am not so exacting. As we move
Further and further down the path of fate
To the sure tomb, we yield up, one by one,
Our claims on Fortune, till with each new year
We seek less and go further to obtain it.
'Tis the old tale — aye, all of us must learn it!
But yet I would not empty-handed stand
Before the House of Hades. Still there's life,
And hope with life ; and much that may be done.
Look up, O thou most dear and cherisht head!
We'll strive still, conquering ; or, if falling, fall
In sight of grand results.

ÆGISTHUS.

May these things be!
I know not. All is vague. I should be strong
Even were you weak. 'Tis otherwise — I see
No path to safety sure. We have done ill things.
Best let the past be past, lest new griefs come.
Best we part now.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Part! what, to part from thee
Never till death — not in death even, part!

ÆGISTHUS.

But one course now is left.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And that is —

ÆGISTHUS.

Flight

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Coward!

ÆGISTHUS.

I care not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Flight! I am a Queen.
A goddess once you said — and why not goddess?
Seeing the Gods are mightier than we
By so much more of courage. Oh, not I,
But you, are mad.

ÆGISTHUS.

Nay, wiser than I was.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And you will leave me?

ÆGISTHUS.

Not if you will come.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

This was the Atlas of the world I built!

ÆGISTHUS.

Flight! . . . yes, I know not . . . somewhere . anywhere.
You come? . . . you come not? . . . well? . . . a time to pause!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And this is he — this he, the man I loved!
And this is retribution! O my heart!
O Agamemnon, how art thou avenged!
And I have done so much for him! . . . would do
So much! . . . a universe lies ruin'd here.
Now by Apollo, be a man for once!
Be for once strong, or be forever weak!

If shame be dead, and honour be no more,
No more true faith, nor that which in old time
Made us like Gods, sublime in our high place,
Yet all surviving instincts warn from flight.
Flight! — oh, impossible! Even now the steps
Of fate are at the threshold. Which way fly?
For every avenue is barr'd by death.
Will these not scout your flying heels? If now
They hate us powerful, will they love us weak?
No land is safe; nor any neighbouring king
Will harbour Agamemnon's enemy.
Reflect on Troy; her ashes smoulder yet.

ÆGISTHUS.

Her words compel me with their awful truth.
For so would vengeance hound and earth us down.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

If I am weak to move you by that love
You swore long since — and seal'd it with false lips! —
Yet lives there nothing of the ambitious will?
Of those proud plots, and dexterous policy,
On which you builded such high hopes, and swore
To rule this people Agamemnon rules;
Supplant him eminent on his own throne,
And push our power thro' Greece?

ÆGISTHUS.

The dream was great.
It was a dream. We dreamt it like a king.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, and shall so fulfil it — like a King!
Who talks of flight? For now, bethink you well,
If to live on, the byword of a world,
Be any gain, even such flight offers not.
Will long-arm'd Vengeance never find you out
When you have left the weapon in her hands?

Be bold, and meet her! Who forestall the bolts
Of heaven, the Gods deem worthy of the Gods.
Success is made the measure of our acts.
And, think Ægisthus, there has been one thought
Before us in the intervals of years,
Between us ever in the long dark nights,
When, lying all awake, we heard the wind.
Did you shrink then? or, only closer drawing
Your lips to mine, your arms about my neck,
Say, "Who would fear such chances, when he saw
Behind them such a prize for him as this?"
Do you shrink now? Dare you put all this from you?
Revoke the promise of those years, and say
This propect meets you unprepared at last?
Our motives are so mixt in their beginnings
And so confused, we recognize them not
Till they are grown to acts; but ne'er were ours
So blindly wov'n, but what we both untangled
Out of the intricacies of the heart
One purpose: — being found, best grapple to it.
For to conceive ill deeds yet dare not do them,
This is not virtue, but a twofold shame.
Between the culprit and the Demi-god
There's but one difference men regard — success.
The weakly-wicked shall be doubly damned!

ÆGISTHUS.

I am not weak .... what will you? .... oh, too weak
To bear this scorn! ... She is a godlike fiend
And hell and heaven seem meeting in her eyes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Those who on perilous ventures once embark
Should burn their ships, nor ever dream return.
Better, tho' all Olympus march'd on us,
To die like fallen Titans, scorning Heaven,
Than live like slaves in scorn of our own selves!

ÆGISTHUS.

We wait then? Good! and dare this desperate
chance.
And if we fall (as we, I think, must fall)
It is but some few sunny hours we lose,
Some few bright days. True! and a little less
Of life, or else of wrong a little more,
What's that? For one shade more or less the
night
Will scarce seem darker or lighter — the long
night!
We'll fall together, if we fall; and if —
Oh if we live! —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, that was noblier thought
Now you grow back into yourself, your true self
My King! my chosen! my glad careless help-
mate
In the old time! we shared its pleasant days
Royally, did we not? How brief they were!
Nor will I deem you less than what I know
You have it in you to become, for this
Strange freakish fear — this passing brief alarm
Do I not know the noble steed will start
Aside, scared lightly by a straw, a shadow,
A thorn-bush in the way, while the dull mule
Plods stupidly adown the dizziest paths?
And oft indeed, such trifles will dismay
The finest and most eager spirits, which yet
Daunt not a duller mind. O love, be sure
Whate'er betide, whether for well or ill,
Thy fate and mine are bound up in one skein
Clotho must cut them both inseparate.
You dare not leave me — had you wings for
flight!
You shall not leave me! You are mine, indeed,
(As I am yours!) by my strong right of grief.
Not death together, but together life!

Life — life with safe and honourable years,
And power to do with these that which we would!
— His lips comprest — his eye dilates — he is saved!
O, when strong natures into frailer ones
Have struck deep root, if one exalt not both,
Both must drag down and perish!

ÆGISTHUS.

If we should live —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And we shall live.

ÆGISTHUS.

Yet . . . yet —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What! shrinking still?
I'll do the deed. Do not stand off from me.

ÆGISTHUS.

Terrible Spirit!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, not terrible,
Not to thee terrible — O say not so!
To thee I never have been anything
But a weak, passionate, unhappy woman
(O woe is me!) and now you fear me —

ÆGISTHUS.

No,
But rather worship.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O my heart, my heart,
It sends up all its anguish in this cry —
Love me a little!

ÆGISTHUS.

What a spell she has
To sway the inmost courses of the soul!
My spirit is held up to such a height
I dare not breathe. How finely sits this sorrow
Upon her, like the garment of a God!
I cannot fathom her. Does the same birth
Bring forth the monster and the demi-god?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I will not doubt! All's lost, if love be lost—
Peace, honour, innocence—gone, gone! all gone!
And you, too—you, poor baffled crownless schemer,
Whose life my love makes royal, clothes in purple,
Establishes in state, without me, answer me,
What should you do but perish, as is fit?
O love, you dare not cease to love me now!
We have let the world go by us. We have trusted
To ourselves only: if we fail ourselves
What shall avail us now? Without my love
What rests for you but universal hate,
And Agamemnon's sword? Ah, no—you love me,
Must love me, better than you ever loved—
Love me, I think, as you love life itself!
Ægisthus! Speak Ægisthus!

ÆGISTHUS.

O great heart
I am all yours. Do with me what you will.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, if you love me, I have strength for both.
And you do love me still?

ÆGISTHUS.

O more, thrice more,
Thrice more than wert thou Aphroditè's self
Stept zoned and sandal'd from the Olympian Feast
Or first reveal'd among the pink sea-foam.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Whate'er I am, be sure that I am that
Which thou hast made me — nothing of myself.
Once, all unheedful, careless of myself,
And wholly ignorant of what I was,
I grew up as a reed some wind will touch,
And wake to prophecy — till then all mute,
And void of melody — a foolish weed!
My soul was blind, and all my life was dark,
And all my heart pined with some ignorant want.
I moved about, a shadow in the house,
And felt unwedded though I was a wife;
And all the men and women which I saw
Were but as pictures painted on a wall:
To me they had not either heart, or brain,
Or lips, or language — pictures! nothing more.
Then, suddenly, athwart those lonely hours
Which, day by day dream'd listlessly away,
Led to the dark and melancholy tomb,
Thy presence passed and touch'd me with a soul.
My life did but begin when I found thee.
O what a strength was hidden in this heart!
As, all unvalued, in its cold dark cave
Under snow hills, some rare and priceless gem
May sparkle and burn, so in this life of mine
Love lay shut up. You broke the rock away,
You lit upon the jewel that it hid,
You pluck'd it forth — to wear it, my Belov'd!
To set in the crown of thy dear life!
To embellish fortune! Cast it not away.
Now call me by the old familiar names:
Call me again your Queen, as once you used;
Your large-eyed Herë!

ÆGISTHUS.

Oh, you are a Queen
That should have none but Gods to rule over!
Make me immortal with one costly kiss!

VIII. CHORUS. ELECTRA. CLYTEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CHORUS.

Io! Io! I hear the people shout.

ELECTRA.

See how these two do mutually confer,
Hatching new infamy. Now will he dare,
In his unbounded impudence, to meet
My father's eyes? The hour is nigh at hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O love, be bold! the hour is nigh at hand.

ELECTRA.

Laden with retribution, lingering slow.

ÆGISTHUS.

A time in travail with some great distress.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, rather safety for the rest of time.
O love! O hate!

ELECTRA.

O vengeance!

ÆGISTHUS.

O wild chance
If favouring fate—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Despair is more than fate.

CHORUS.

Io! Io! The King is on his march.

ÆGISTHUS.

Did you hear that?

ELECTRA.

The hour is nigh at hand!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Leave me to deal with these. I know the arts
That guide the doubtful purpose of discourse
Thro' many windings to the appointed goal.
I'll draw them on to such a frame of mind
As best befits our purpose. You, meanwhile,
Scatter vague words among the other crowd,
Lest the event, when it is due, fall foul
Of unpropitious natures.

ÆGISTHUS.

Do you fear
The helpless, blind ill-will of such a crowd?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He only fears mankind who knows them not.
But him I praise not who despises them.
Whence come, Electra?

ELECTRA.

From my father's hearth
To meet him; for the hour is nigh at hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So do our hopes race hotly to one end,
(A noble rivalry!) as who shall first
Embrace this happy fortune. Tarry not.
We too will follow.

ELECTRA.

Justice, O be swift!

IX CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS HERALD.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A froward child! She's gone. My blood's in her.
Her father's, too, looks out of that proud face.
She is too bold . . . ha, well — Ægisthus? . . gone!
O fate! to be a woman! You great Gods,
Why did you fashion me in this soft mould?
Give me these lengths of silky hair? These hands
Too delicately dimpled! and these arms
Too white, too weak! yet leave the man's heart in me,
To mar your masterpiece — that I should perish,
Who else had won renown among my peers,
A man, with men — perchance a god with you,
Had you but better sex'd me, you blind Gods!
But, as for man, all things are fitting to him.
He strikes his fellow 'mid the clanging shields,
And leaps among the smoking walls, and takes
Some long-hair'd virgin wailing at the shrines,
Her brethren having fallen; and you Gods
Commend him, crown him, grant him ample days,
And dying honour, and an endless peace
Among the deep Elysian asphodels.
O fate, to be a woman! To be led
Dumb, like a poor mule, at a master's will,
And be a slave, tho' bred in palaces,
And be a fool, tho' seated with the wise —
A poor and pitiful fool, as I am now,
Loving and hating my vain life away!

CHORUS.

These flowers — we pluck'd them

At morning, and took them
From bright bees that suck'd them
And warm winds that shook them
'Neath blue hills that o'erlook them.

SEMI-CHORUS.

With the dews of the meadow
Our rosy warm fingers
Sparkle yet, and the shadow
Of the summer-cloud lingers
In the hair of us singers.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Ere these buds on our altars
Fade; ere the forkt fire,
Fed with pure honey falters,
And fails; louder, higher
Raise the Pæan.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Draw nigher,
Stand closer! First praise we
The Father of all.
To him the song raise we.
Over Heaven's golden wall
Let it fall! Let it fall!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Then Apollo, the king of
The lyre and the bow;
Who taught us to sing of
The deeds that we know —
Deeds well done long ago.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Next, of all the Immortals,
Athenë's gray eyes;
Who sits throned in our portals,
Ever fair, ever wise.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Neither dare we despise
To extol the great Herë.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

And then,
As is due, shall our song
Be of those among men
Who were brave, who were strong,
Who endured.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Then, the wrong
Of the Phrygian: and Ilion's false sons:
And Scamander's wild wave
Thro' the bleak plain that runs.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Then, the death of the brave.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Last, of whom the Gods save
For new honours: of them none
So good or so great
As our chief Agamemnon
The crown of our State.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O friends, true hearts, rejoice with me! This day
Shall crown the hope of ten uncertain years!

CHORUS.

For Agamemnon cannot be far off —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He comes — and yet — O Heaven preserve us all!
My heart is weak — there's One he brings not back;

Who went with him; who will not come again;
Whom we shall never see! —

CHORUS.

O Queen, for whom,
Lamenting thus, is your great heart cast down?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The earliest loved — the early lost! my child —

CHORUS.

Iphigenia?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

She — my child —

CHORUS.

— Alas!
That was a terrible necessity!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Was it necessity? O pardon, friends,
But in the dark, unsolaced solitude,
Wild thoughts come to me, and perplex my heart.
This, which you call a dread necessity,
Was it a murder or a sacrifice?

CHORUS.

It was a God that did decree the death.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis through the heart the Gods do speak to us.
High instincts are the oracles of heaven.
Did ever heart — did ever God, before,
Suggest such foul infanticidal lie?

CHORUS.

Be comforted! The universal good
Needed this single, individual loss.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Can all men's good be helped by one man's crime?

CHORUS.

He loosed the Greeks from Aulis by that deed.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O casual argument! Who gave the Greeks
Such bloody claim upon a virgin's life?
Shall the pure bleed to purge impurity?
A hundred Helens were not worth that death!
What! had the manhood of combinéd Greece,
Whose boast was in its untamed strength, no help
Better than the spilt blood of one poor girl?
Or, if it were of need that blood should flow,
What God ordain'd him executioner?
Was it for him the Armament was plann'd?
For him that angry Greece was leagued in war?
For him, or Menelaus, was this done?
Was the cause his, or Menelaus' cause?
Was he less sire than Menelaus was?
He, too, had children; did he murder them?
O, was it manlike? was it human, even?

CHORUS.

Alas! alas! it was an evil thing.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O friends, if any one among you all,
If any be a mother, bear with me!
She was my earliest born, my best beloved
The painful labour of that perilous birth
That gave her life did almost take my own.
He had no pain. He did not bring her forth.
How should he therefore, love her as I loved

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! alas! Our tears run down with yours

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, who shall say with what delicious tears,
With what ineffable tenderness, while he
Took his blithe pastime on the windy plain,
Among the ringing camps, and neighing steeds,
First of his glad compeers, I sat apart,
Silent, within the solitary house:
Rocking the little child upon my breast;
And soothed its soft eyes into sleep with song!

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! unhappy, sad, unchilded one!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Or, when I taught, from inarticulate sounds,
The little, lisping, lips, to breathe his name.
Now they will never breathe that name again!

CHORUS.

Alas! for Hades has not any hope,
Since Thracian women lopp'd the tuneful head
Of Orpheus, and Heracleus is no more.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Or, spread in prayer the helpless, infant hands,
That they, too, might invoke the gods for him.
Alas, who now invokes the Gods for her?
Unwedded, hapless, gone to glut the womb
Of dark, untimely Orcus!

CHORUS.

Ai! alas!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I would have died, if that could be, for her!
When life is half-way set to feeble eld,
And memory more than hope, and to dim eyes
The gorgeous tapestry of existence shows
Moth'd, finger'd, fray'd, and bare, 'twere not so
hard

To fling away this ravell'd skein of life,
Which else, a little later, Fate had cut.
And who would sorrow for the o'erblown rose
Sharp winter strews about its own bleak thorns?
But, cropp'd before the time, to fall so young!
And wither in the gloomy crown of Dis!
Never to look upon the blessed sun —

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! alinon! woe is me, this grief
Strikes pity paralyzed. All words are weak!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And I had dreamed such splendid dreams for her!
Who would not so for Agamemnon's child?
For we had hoped that she, too, in her time
Would be the mother of heroic men!

CHORUS.

There rises in my heart an awful fear,
Lest from these evils darker evils come;
For heaven exacts, for wrong, the uttermost tear,
And death hath language after life is dumb!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

It works! it works!

CHORUS.

Look, some one comes this way

HERALD.

O Honour of the House of Tantalus!
The king's wheels echo in the brazen gates.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Our heart is half-way there, to welcome him.
How looks he? Well? And all our long-lost friends —

Their faces grow before me! Lead the way
Where we may meet them. All our haste seems
slow.

CHORUS.

Would that he brought his dead child back with
him!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now let him come. The mischief works apace!

X. CHORUS.

CHORUS.

The winds were lull'd in Aulis; and the day,
Down-sloped, was loitering to the lazy west.
There was no motion of the glassy bay,
But all things by a heavy light opprest.
Windless, cut off from the destined way —
Dark shrouds, distinct against the lurid lull —
Dark ropes hung useless, loose, from mast to
hull —
The black ships lay abreast.
Not any cloud would cross the brooding skies.
The distant sea boom'd faintly. Nothing more.
They walked about upon the yellow shore;
Or, lying listless, huddled groups supine,
With faces turn'd toward the flat sea-spine,
They plann'd the Phrygian battle o'er, and o'er;
Till each grew sullen, and would talk no more,
But sat, dumb-dreaming. Then would some one
rise,
And look toward the hollow hulls, with haggard,
hopeless eyes —
Wild eyes — and, crowding round, yet wilder
eyes —
And gaping, languid lips;
And everywhere that men could see,

About the black, black ships,
Was nothing but the deep-red sea;
The deep-red shore;
The deep-red skies;
The deep-red silence, thick with thirsty sighs;
And daylight, dying slowly. Nothing more.
The tall masts stood upright;
And not a sail above the burnish'd prores;
The languid sea, like one outwearied quite,
Shrank, dying inward into hollow shores,
And breathless harbours, under sandy bars;
And, one by one, down tracts of quivering blue,
The singed and sultry stars
Look'd from the inmost heaven, far, faint, and few,
While, all below, the sick, and steaming brine
The spill'd-out sunset did incarnadine.

At last one broke the silence; and a word
Was lisp'd and buzz'd about, from mouth to mouth;
Pale faces grew more pale; wild whispers stirr'd;
And men, with moody, murmuring lips, conferr'd
In ominous tones, from shaggy beards uncouth:
As tho' some wind had broken from the blurr'd
And blazing prison of the stagnant drouth,
And stirr'd the salt sea in the stifled south.
The long-robed priests stood round; and, in the gloom,
Under black brows, their bright and greedy eyes
Shone deathfully; there was a sound of sighs,
Thick-sobb'd from choking throats among the crowd,
That, whispering, gather'd close, with dark heads bow'd;
But no man lifted up his voice aloud,
For heavy hung o'er all the helpless sense of doom.

Then, after solemn prayer,

The father bade the attendants, tenderly
Lift her upon the lurid altar-stone.
There was no hope in any face; each eye
Swam tearful, that her own did gaze upon.
They bound her helpless hands with mournful care;
And loop'd up her long hair,
That hung about her, like an amber shower,
Mix'd with the saffron robe, and falling lower,
Down from her bare, and cold, white shoulder flung.
Upon the heaving breast the pale cheek hung,
Suffused with that wild light that roll'd among
The pausing crowd, out of the crimson drouth.
They held hot hands upon her pleading mouth;
And stifled on faint lips the natural cry.
Back from the altar-stone,
Slow-moving in his fixéd place
A little space,
The speechless father turn'd. No word was said.
He wrapp'd his mantle close about his face,
In his dumb grief, without a moan.
The lopping axe was lifted overhead.
Then, suddenly,
There sounded a strange motion of the sea,
Booming far inland; and above the east
A ragged cloud rose slowly, and increas'd.
Not one line in the horoscope of Time
Is perfect. Oh, what falling off is this,
When some grand soul, that else had been sublime
Falls unawares amiss,
And stoops its crested strength to sudden crime

So gracious a thing is it, and sweet,
In life's clear centre one true man to see,
That holds strong nature in a wise control;
Throbbing out, all round, the heat
Of a large, and liberal soul.
No shadow, simulating life,
But pulses warm with human nature.

In a soul of godlike stature;
Heart, and brain, all rich and rife
With noble instincts; strong to meet
Time calmly, in his purposed place.
Sound thro' and thro', and all complete;
Exalting what is low, and base;
Enlarging what is narrow, and small;
He stamps his character on all,
And with his grand identity
Fills up Creation's eye.
He will not dream the aimless years away
In blank delay,
But makes eternity of to-day,
And reaps the full-ear'd time. For him
Nature her affluent horn doth brim,
To strew with fruit and flowers his way —
Fruits ripe, and flowers gay.

The clear soul in his earnest eyes
Looks thro' and thro' all plaited lies,
Time shall not rob him of his youth,
Nor narrow his large sympathies.
He is not true, he is a truth,
And such a truth as never dies.
Who knows his nature, feels his right,
And, toiling, toils for his delight;
Not as slaves toil: where'er he goes,
The desert blossoms with the rose.
He trusts himself in scorn of doubt,
And lets orb'd purpose widen out.
The world works with him; all men see
Some part of them fulfill'd in him;
His memory never shall grow dim;
He holds the heaven and earth in fee,
Not following that, fulfilling this,
He is immortal, for he is!

O weep! weep! weep!
Weep for the young that die;
As it were pale flowers that wither under

The smiting sun, and fall asunder,
Before the dews on the grass are dry,
Or the tender twilight is out of the sky,
Or the lilies have fall'n asleep;
Or ships by a wanton wind cut short
Are wreck'd in sight of the placid port
Sinking strangely, and suddenly—
Sadly, and strangely, and suddenly—
Into the black Plutonian deep.
O weep! weep! weep!
Weep, and bow the head,
For those whose sun is set at noon;
Whose night is dark, without a moon·
Whose aim of life is sped
Beyond pursuing woes,
And the arrow of angry foes,
To the darkness that no man knows—
The darkness among the dead.
Let us mourn, and bow the head,
And lift up the voice, and weep
For the early dead!
For the early dead we may bow the head,
And strike the breast, and weep;
But, oh, what shall be said
For the living sorrow?
For the living sorrow our grief—
Dumb grief—draws no relief
From tears, nor yet may borrow
Solace from sound, or speech;—
For the living sorrow
That heaps to-morrow upon to-morrow
In piled up pain, beyond Hope's reach!
It is well that we mourn for the early dead,
Strike the breast, and bow the head;
For the sorrow for these may be sung, or said,
And the chaplets be woven for the fall'n head,
And the urns to the stately tombs be led,
And Love from their memory may be fed,
And song may ennoble the anguish;

But, oh, for the living sorrow —
For the living sorrow what hopes remain?
For the prison'd, pining, passionate pain,
That is doom'd forever to languish,
And to languish forever in vain,
For the want of the words that may bestead
The hunger that out of loss is bred.
O friends, for the living sorrow —
For the living sorrow —
For the living sorrow what shall be said?

XI. A PHOCIAN. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS.

PHOCIAN.

O noble strangers, if indeed you be
Such as you seem, of Argos, and the land
That the unconquer'd Agamemnon rules,
Tell me is this the palace, these the roofs
Of the Atridæ, famed in ancient song?

CHORUS.

Not without truth you name the neighbourhood,
Standing before the threshold, and the doors
Of Pelops, and upon the Argive soil.
That which you see above the Agora
Is the old fane of the Lycæan God,
And this the house of Agamemnon's queen.
But whence art thou? For if thy dusty locks,
And those soil'd sandals show with aught of truth,
Thou shouldst be come from far.

PHOCIAN.

And am so, friends,
But, by Heaven's favour, here my journey ends.

CHORUS.

Whence, then, thy way?

PHOCIAN.

From Phocis; charged with gifts
For Agamemnon, and with messages
From Strophius, and the sister of your king.
Our watchmen saw the beacon on the hills,
And leap'd for joy. Say, is the king yet come?

CHORUS.

He comes this way; stand by, I hear them shout
Here shall you meet him, as he mounts the hill.

PHOCIAN.

Now blest be all the Gods, from Father Zeus,
Who reigns o'er windy Œta, far away,
To King Apollo, with the golden horns.

CHORUS.

Look how they cling about him! Far, and near,
The town breaks loose, and follows after,
Crowding up the ringing ways.
The boy forgets to watch the steer;
The grazing steer forgets to graze;
The shepherd leaves the herd;
The priest will leave the fane;
The deep heart of the land is stirr'd
To sunny tears, and tearful laughter,
To look into his face again.

Burst, burst the brazen gates?
Throw open the hearths, and follow!
Let the shouts of the youths go up to Apollo,
Lord of the graceful quiver:
Till the tingling sky dilates —
Dilates, and palpitates;
And, Pæan! Pæan! the virgins sing;
Pæan! Pæan! the king! the king!
Laden with spoils from Phrygia!
Io! Io! Io! they sing
Till the pillars of Olympus ring:

Io! to Queen Ortygia,
Whose double torch shall burn forever!
But thou, O Lord of the graceful quiver,
Bid, bid thy Pythian splendour halt,
Where'er he beams, surpassing sight;
Or on some ocean isthmus bent,
Or wheel'd from the dark continent,
Half-way down Heaven's rosy vault,
Toward the dewy cone of night.
Let not the breathless air grow dim,
Until the whole land look at him!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Stand back!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Will he come this way?

SEMI-CHORUS.

No; by us

SEMI-CHORUS.

Gods, what a crowd!

SEMI-CHORUS.

How firm the old men walk

SEMI-CHORUS.

There goes the king. I know him by his beard.

SEMI-CHORUS.

And I, too, by the manner of his gait.
That God-like spirit lifts him from the earth

SEMI-CHORUS.

How gray he looks!

SEMI-CHORUS.

His cheek is seam'd with scars

SEMI-CHORUS.

What a bull's front!

SEMI-CHORUS.

He stands up like a tower.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Ay, like some moving tower of arméd men,
That carries conquest under city-walls.

SEMI-CHORUS.

He lifts his sublime head, and in his port
Bears eminent authority.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Behold,
His spear shows like the spindle of a Fate!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Oh, what an arm!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Most fit for such a sword;
Look at that sword.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What shoulders!

SEMI-CHORUS.

What a throat

SEMI-CHORUS.

What are these bearing?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Urns.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Alas! alas!

SEMI-CHORUS.

O friends, look here! now are the mighty men
Shrunk up into a little vase of earth,
A child might lift. Sheath'd each in brazen plates,
They went so heavy, they come back so light,
Sheath'd, each one, in the brazen urn of death!

SEMI-CHORUS.

With what a stateliness he moves along!

SEMI-CHORUS.

See, how they touch his skirt, and grasp his hand!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Is that the queen?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Ay, how she matches him!
With what grand eyes she looks up, full in his!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Say, what are these?

SEMI-CHORUS.

O Phrygians! how they walk
The only sad men in the crowd, I think.

SEMI-CHORUS.

But who is this, that with such scornful brows,
And looks averted, walks among the rest?

SEMI-CHORUS.

I know not, but some Phrygian woman, sure.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Her heavy-fallen hair down her white neck
(A dying sunbeam tangled in each tress)
All its neglected beauty pours one way.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Her looks bend ever on the alien ground
As tho' the stones of Troy were in her path.
And in the painéd paleness of her brow
Sorrow hath made a regal tenement.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Here comes Electra; young Orestes, too;
See how he emulates his father's stride!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look at Ægisthus, where he walks apart,
And bites his lip.

SEMI-CHORUS.

I oft have seen him so
When something chafes him in his bitter moods.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Peace, here they come!

CHORUS.

Io! Io! The King!

XII. AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA, ÆGISTHUS ELECTRA, ORESTES, CASSANDRA, A PHOCIAN CHORUS, SEMI-CHORUS, *and others in the procession*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O blazing sun, that in thy skyey tower
Pausest to see one kingly as thyself,
Lend all thy brightest beams to light his head,
And gild our gladness! Friends, behold the King!
Now hath Ætolian Jove, the arbiter
Of conquests, well disposed the issues here;
For every night that brought not news from Troy
Heap'd fear on fear, as waves succeed to waves,
When Northern blasts blow white the Cretan main —

Knowing that thou, far off, from toil to toil
Climbedst, uncertain. Unto such an one
His children, and young offspring of the house
Are as a field, which he, the husbandman,
Owning far off, does only look upon
At seed time once, nor then till harvest comes;
And his sad wife must wet with nightly tears
Unsolaced pillows, fearing for his fate.
To these how welcome, then, his glad return,
When he, as thou, comes heavy with the weight
Of great achievements, and the spoils of time.

AGAMEMNON.

Enough! enough! we weigh you at full worth,
And hold you dear, whose gladness equals yours;
But women ever err by over-talk.
Silence to women, as the beard to men,
Brings honour; and plain truth is hurt, not help'd
By many words. To each his separate sphere
The Gods allot. To me the sounding camp,
Steeds, and the oaken spear; to you the hearth,
Children, and household duties of the loom.
'Tis man's to win an honourable name;
Woman's to keep it honourable still.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

(O beast! O weakness of this womanhood!
To let these pompous male things strut in our eyes,
And in their lordship lap themselves secure,
Because the lots in life are fallen to them.
Am I less heart and head, less blood and brain,
Less force and feeling, pulse and passion — I —
Than this self-worshipper — a lie all thro'?)
Forgive if joy too long unloose our lips,
Silent so long: your words fall on my soul
As rain on thirsty lands, that feeds the dearth
With blessèd nourishment. My whole heart hears
You speaking thus, I would be silent ever.

AGAMEMNON.

Who is this man ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A Phocian, by his look.

PHOCIAN.

O King, from Strophius, and your sister's court,
Despatch'd with this seal'd tablet, and with gifts
Tho' both express, so says my royal Head,
But poorly the rich welcome they intend.
Will you see this ? — and these ?

AGAMEMNON.

Anon ! anon !
We'll look at them within. O child, thine eyes
Look warmer welcome than all words express.
Thou art mine own child by that royal brow.
Nature hath mark'd thee mine.

ELECTRA.

O Father !

AGAMEMNON.

Come !
And our Orestes ! He is nobly grown ;
He shall do great deeds when our own are dim.
So shall men come to say "the father's sword
In the son's hands hath hewn out nobler fame."
Think of it, little one ! where is our cousin ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Here ! And the keys of the Acropolis ?

AGAMEMNON.

O well ! this dust and heat are over much.
And, cousin, you look pale. Anon ! anon !
Speak to us by and bye. Let business wait.
Is our house order'd ? we will take the bath.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Will you within? where all is order'd fair
Befitting state: cool chambers, marble-floor'd
Or piled with blazing carpets, scented rare
With the sweet spirit of each odorous gum
In dim, delicious, amorous mists about
The purple-paven, silver-sided bath,
Deep, flashing, pure.

AGAMEMNON.

Look to our captives then.
I charge you chiefly with this woman here,
Cassandra, the mad prophetess of Troy.
See that you chafe her not in her wild moods

XIII. CLYTEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Linger not!

ÆGISTHUS.

What? you will to-day —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

— This hour

ÆGISTHUS.

Oh, if some chance mar all!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

We'll make chance sure
Doubt is the doomsman of self-judged disgrace:
But every chance brings safety to self-help.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ay, but the means — the time —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

— Fulfil themselves
O most irresolute heart! is this a time
When thro' the awful pause of life, distinct,
The sounding shears of Fate slope near, to stand
Meek, like tame wethers, and be shorn? How say you,
The blithe wind up, and the broad sea before him,
Who would crouch all day long beside the mast
Counting the surges beat his idle helm,
Because between him and the golden isles
The shadow of a passing storm might hang?
Danger, being pregnant, doth beget resolve.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou wert not born to fail. Give me thy hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Take it.

ÆGISTHUS.

It does not tremble.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O be strong!
The future hangs upon the die we cast:
Fortune plays high for us —

ÆGISTHUS.

Gods grant she win

XIV. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS. CASSANDRA.

CHORUS.

O thou that dost with globéd glory
Sweep the dark world at noon of night,

Or among snowy summits, wild, and hoary,
Or thro' the mighty silences
Of immemorial seas,
With all the stars behind thee flying white,
O take with thee, where'er
Thou wanderest, ancient Care,
And hide her in some interlunar haunt;
Where but the wild bird's chaunt
At night, thro' rocky ridges gaunt,
Or moanings of some homeless sea may find her
There, Goddess, bar, and bind her;
Where she may pine, but wander not;
Loathe her haunts, but leave them not;
Wail and rave to the wind and wave
That hear, yet understand her not;
And curse her chains, yet cleave them not;
And hate her lot, yet help it not.
Or let her rove with Gods undone
Who dwell below the setting sun,
And the sad western hours
That burn in fiery bowers;
Or in Amphitritë's grot
Where the vexéd tides unite,
And the spent wind, howling, breaks
O'er sullen oceans out of sight
Among sea-snakes, that the white moon wakes
Till they shake themselves into diamond flakes,
Coil and twine in the glittering brine
And swing themselves in the long moonshine;
Or by wild shores hoarsely rage,
And moan, and vent her spite,
In some inhospitable harbourage
Of Thracian waters, white.
There let her grieve, and grieve, and hold her
breath
Until she hate herself to death.
I seem with rapture lifted higher,
Like one in mystic trance.
O Pan! Pan! Pan!

First friend of man,
And founder of Heaven's choir,
Come thou from old Cyllenë, and inspire
The Gnossian, and Nysæan dance!
Come thou, too, Delian king,
From the blue Ægean sea,
And Mycone's yellow coast:
Give my spirit such a wing
As there the foolish Icarus lost,
That she may soar above the cope
Of this high pinnacle of gladness,
And dizzy height of hope;
And there, beyond all reach of sadness,
May tune my lips to sing
Great Pæans, full, and free,
Till the whole world ring
With such heart-melting madness
As bards are taught by thee!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look to the sad Cassandra, how she stands!

SEMI-CHORUS.

She turns not from the wringing of her hands

SEMI-CHORUS.

What is she doing?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look, her lips are moved

SEMI-CHORUS.

And yet their motion shapes not any sound.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Speak to her.

SEMI-CHORUS.

She will heed not.

SEMI-CHORUS.

But yet speak.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Unhappy woman, cease a little while
From mourning. Recognize the work of Heaven.
Troy smoulders. Think not of it. Let the past
Be buried in the past. Tears mend it not.
Fate may be kindlier, yet, than she appears.

SEMI-CHORUS.

She does not answer.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Call to her again.

SEMI-CHORUS.

O break this scornful silence! Hear us speak.
We would console you.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look, how she is moved!

SEMI-CHORUS.

O speak! the heart's hurt oft is help'd by words.

CASSANDRA.

O Itys! Itys! Itys!

SEMI-CHORUS.

What a shriek!
She takes the language of the nightingale,
Unhappy bird! that mourns her perish'd form,
And leans her breast against a thorn, all night.

CASSANDRA.

The bull is in the shambles.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Listen, friends!
She mutters something to herself.

CASSANDRA.

Alas!
Did any name Apollo? woe is me!

SEMI-CHORUS.

She calls upon the God.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Unhappy one,
What sorrow strikes thee with bewilderment?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Now she is mute again.

CHORUS.

A Stygian cold
Creeps thro' my limbs, and loosens every joint.
The hot blood freezes in its arteries,
And stagnates round the region of the heart.
A cloud comes up from sooty Acheron,
And clothes mine eyelids
With infernal night.
My hair stands up.
What supernatural awe
Shoots, shrivelling thro' me,
To the marrow, and bone?
O dread, and wise Prophetic Powers,
Whose strong-compelling law
Doth hold in awe
The labouring hours,
Your intervention I invoke,
My soul from this wild doubt to save;
Whether you have
Your dwelling in some dark, oracular cave,
Or solemn, sacred oak;

Or in Dodona's ancient, honour'd beech,
Whose mystic boughs above
Sat the wise dove;
Or if the tuneful voice of old
Awake in Delos, to unfold
Dark wisdom in ambiguous speech.
Upon the verge of strange despair
My heart grows dizzy. Now I seem
Like one that dreams some ghastly dream,
And cannot cast away his care,
But harrows all the haggard air
With his hard breath. Above, beneath,
The empty silence seems to teem
With apprehension. O declare
What hidden thing doth Fate prepare,
What hidden, horrible thing doth Fate prepare?
For of some hidden grief my heart seems half aware.

XV. CLYTEMNESTRA. CASSANDRA. CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

One blow makes all sure. Ay, but then — beyond?
I cannot trammel up the future thus,
And so forecast the time, as with one blow
To break the hundred Hydra-heads of Chance.
Beyond — beyond I dare not look, for who,
If first he scann'd the space, would leap the gulf?
One blow secures the moment. Oh, but he . . .
Ay, there it lies! I dread lest my love, being
So much the stronger, scare his own to death;
As what they comprehend not, men abhor.
He has a wavering nature, easily
Unpoised; and trembling ever on extremes.
Oh, what if terror outweigh love, and love,
Having defiled his countenance, take part

Against himself, self-loathed, a fallen God?
Ah, his was never yet the loving soul,
But rather that which lets itself be loved;
As some loose lily leans upon a lake,
Letting the lymph reflect it, as it will,
Still idly sway'd, whichever way the stream
Stirs the green tangles of the water moss.
The flower of his love never bloom'd upright,
But a sweet parasite, that loved to lean
On stronger natures, winning strength from them —
Not such a flower as whose delirious cup
Maddens the bee, and never can give forth
Enough of fragrance, yet is ever sweet.
Yet which is sweetest — to receive or give?
Sweet to receive, and sweet to give, in love!
When one is never sated that receives,
Nor ever all exhausted one that gives.
I think I love him more, that I resemble
So little aught that pleases me in him.
Perchance, if I dared question this dark heart,
'Tis not for him, but for myself in him,
For that which is my softer self in him —
I have done this, and this — and shall do more:
Hoped, wept, dared wildly, and will overcome!
Does he not need me? It is sweet to think
That I am all to him, whate'er I be
To others; and to one — little, I know!
But to him, all things — sceptre, sword, and crown.
For who would live, but to be loved by some one?
Be fair, but to give beauty to another?
Or wise, but to instruct some sweet desire?
Or strong, but that thereby love may rejoice?
Or who for crime's sake would be criminal?
And yet for love's sake would not dare wild deeds?
A mutual necessity, one fear,
One hope, and the strange posture of the time
Unite us now; — but this need over-past,
Oh, if, 'twixt his embrace and mine, there rise

The reflex of a murder'd head! and he,
Remembering the crime, remember not
It was for him that I am criminal,
But rather hate me for the part he took —
Against his soul, as he will say — in this? —
I will not think it. Upon this wild venture,
Freighted with love's last wealthiest merchandise,
My heart sets forth. To-morrow I shall wake
A beggar, as it may be, or thrice rich.
As one who plucks his last gem from his crown
(Some pearl for which, in youth, he barter'd states)
And, sacrificing with an anxious heart,
Toward night puts seaward in a little bark
For lands reported far beyond the sun,
Trusting to win back kingdoms, or there drown —
So I — and with like perilous endeavour!
Oh, but I think I could implore the Gods
More fervently than ever, in my youth,
I pray'd that help of Heaven I needed not,
And lifted innocent hands to their great sky.
So much to lose . . . so much to gain . . . so much . . .
I dare not think how . . .
Ha, the Phrygian slave!
He dares to bring his mistress to the hearth!
She looks unhappy. I will speak to her.
Perchance her hatred may approve my own,
And help me in the work I am about.
'Twere well to sound her.
Be not so cast down,
Unhappy stranger! Fear no jealous hand.
In sorrow I, too, am not all untried.
Our fortunes are not so dissimilar,
Slaves both — and of one master.
Nay, approach
Is my voice harsh in its appeal to thee?
If so, believe me, it belies my heart.
A woman speaks to thee.
What, silent still?

O look not on me with such sullen eyes,
There is no accusation in my own.
Rather on him that brought thee, than on thee,
Our scorn is settled. I would help thee. Come!
Mute still?
I know that shame is ever dumb,
And ever weak; but here is no reproach.
Listen! Thy fate is given to thy hands.
Art thou a woman, and dost scorn contempt?
Art thou a captive, and dost loathe these bonds?
Art thou courageous, as men call thy race?
Or, helpless art thou, and wouldst overcome?
If so — look up! For there is hope for thee.
Give me thy hand —

CASSANDRA.

Pah! there is blood on it!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What is she raving of?

CASSANDRA.

The place, from old,
Is evil.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, there is a sickness, here,
That needs the knife.

CASSANDRA.

Oh, horrible! blood! blood!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I see you are a Phrygian to the bone!
Coward, and slave! be so for evermore!

CASSANDRA.

Apollo! O Apollo! O blood! blood!
The whole place swims with it! The slippery steps
Steam with the fumes! The rank air smells of
blood!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Heed her not! for she knows not what she says.
This is some falling sickness of the soul.
Her fever frights itself.

CASSANDRA.

It reeks! it reeks!
It smokes! it stifles! blood! blood, everywhere!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'ee, he hath brought this mad woman from Troy,
To shame our honour, and insult our care.
Look to her, friends, my hands have other work!

CHORUS.

Alas, the House of Tantalus is doom'd!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The King sleeps — like an infant. His huge strength
Holds slumber thrice as close as other men.
How well he sleeps! Make garlands for the Gods.
I go to watch the couch. Cull every flower,
And honour all the tutelary fanes
With sacrifice as ample as our joy,
Lest some one say we reverence not the Gods!

CHORUS.

O doomèd House and race!
O toilsome, toilsome horsemanship
Of Pelops; that ill omen brought to us!
For since the drownèd Myrtilus
Did from his golden chariot slip
To his last sleep, below the deep,
Nothing of sad calamitous disgrace
Hath angry Heaven ceased to heap
On this unhappy House of Tantalus.
Not only upon sacred leaves of old,

Preserved in many a guarded, mystic fold,
But sometimes, too, enroll'd
On tablets fair
Of stone, or brass, with quaint and curious care,
In characters of gold,
And many an iron-bound, melancholy book,
The wisdom of the wise is writ;
And hardly shall a man,
For all he can,
By painful, slow degrees,
And nightly reveries
Of long, laborious thought, grow learn'd in these.
But who, that reads a woman's wily look,
Shall say what evil hides, and lurks in it?
Or fathom her false wit?
For by a woman fell the man
Who did Nemæa's pest destroy,
And the brinded Hydra slew,
And many other wonders wrought.
By a woman, fated Troy
Was overset, and fell to nought.
Royal Amphiaraus, too,
All his wisdom could not free
From his false Eriphyle,
Whom a golden necklace bought —
So has it been, and so shall be,
Ever since the world began!

O woman, woman, of what other earth
Hath dædal Nature moulded thee?
Thou art not of our clay compact,
Not of our common clay; —
But when the painful world in labour lay —
Labour long — and agony,
In her heaving throes distract,
And vext with angry Heaven's red ire,
Nature, kneading snow and fire,
In thy mystic being pent
Each contrary element.

Life and death within thee blent:
All despair and all desire:
There to mingle and ferment.
While, mad midwives, at thy birth,
Furies mixt with Sirens bent,
Inter-wreathing snakes and smiles —
Fairest dreams and falsest guiles!

Such a splendid mischief thou!
With thy light of languid eyes:
And thy bosom of pure snow:
And thine heart of fire below,
Whose red light doth come and go
Ever o'er thy changeful cheek
When love-whispers tremble weak:
Thy warm lips and pensive sighs,
That the breathless spirit bow:
And the heavenward life that lies
In the still serenities
Of thy snowy, airy brow —
Thine ethereal airy brow.
Such a splendid mischief, thou!
What are all thy witcheries?
All thine evil beauty? All
Thy soft looks, and subtle smiles?
Tangled tresses? Mad caresses
Tendernesses? tears and kisses?
And the long look, between whiles
That the helpless heart beguiles,
Tranced in such a subtle thrall?
What are all thy sighs and smiles?
Fairest dreams and falsest guiles!
Hoofs to horses, teeth to lions,
Horns to bulls, and speed to hares,
To the fish to glide thro' waters,
To the bird to glide thro' airs,
Nature gave: to men gave courage,
And the use of brazen spears.
What was left to give to woman,

All her gifts thus given ? Ah, tears,
Smiles, and kisses, whispers, glances,
Only these; and merely beauty
On her archéd brows unfurl'd.
And with these she shatters lances,
All unarm'd binds arméd Duty,
And in triumph drags the world!

XVI. SEMI-CHORUS. CHORUS. CASSANDRA AGAMEMNON. CLYTEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Break off, break off! It seems I heard a cry!

CHORUS.

Surely one call'd within the house

SEMI-CHORUS.

Stand by.

CHORUS.

The Prophetess is troubled. Look, her eye
Rolls fearfully.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Now all is husht once more.

CHORUS.

I hear the feet of some one at the door.

(AGAMEMNON, *within.*)

Murdress! oh, oh!

SEMI-CHORUS.

The house is fill'd with shrieks.

CHORUS.

The sound deceives or that was the King's voice.

SEMI-CHORUS.

The voice of Agamemnon!

(AGAMEMNON, *within.*)

Ai! ai! ai!

CASSANDRA.

The bull is in the toils.

(AGAMEMNON, *within.*)

I will not die!

(ÆGISTHUS, *within.*)

O Zeus! he will escape!

(CLYTEMNESTRA, *within.*)

He has it.

(AGAMEMNON, *within.*)

Ai! ai

CHORUS.

Some hideous deed is being done within.
Burst in the doors!

SEMI-CHORUS.

I cannot open them.
Barr'd, barr'd within!

CASSANDRA.

The axe is at the bull

CHORUS.

Call the elders.

SEMI-CHORUS.

And the People. O Argives! Argives!
Alinon! Alinon!

CHORUS.

You to the Agora.

SEMI-CHORUS.

To the temples we.

CHORUS.

Hearken, O maidens!

SEMI-CHORUS.

This way.

CHORUS.

That way.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Quick! quick!

CASSANDRA.

Seal my sight, O Apollo! O Apollo!

CHORUS.

To the Agora!

SEMI-CHORUS.

To the temples!

CHORUS.

Haste haste

(AGAMEMNON, *within.*)

Stabb'd, oh!

CHORUS.

Too late!

CASSANDRA.

The bull is bellowing.

(ÆGISTHUS, *within.*)

Thrust there again:

(CLYTEMNESTRA, *within.*)

One blow has done it all.

(ÆGISTHUS, *within.*)

Is it quite thro'?

(CLYTEMNESTRA, *within.*)

He will not move again.

SEMI-CHORUS.

O Heaven, and Earth! My heart stands still with awe!
Where will this murder end?

CHORUS.

Hold! some one comes!

XVII. ELECTRA. ORESTES. CHORUS. A PHOCIAN.

(ELECTRA *leading* ORESTES.)

Save us! save him — Orestes!

CHORUS.

What has fall'n?

ELECTRA.

An evil thing. Oh, we are fatherless!

CHORUS.

Ill-starr'd Electra! But how fell this chance?

ELECTRA.

Here is no time for words — scarce time for flight
When from his royal bath the King would rise —

That devilish woman, lying long in lurk,
Behind him crept, with stealthy feet unheard,
And flung o'er all his limbs a subtle web.
Caught in the craft of whose contrivéd folds,
Stumbling, he fell. Ægisthus seized a sword;
But halted, half irresolute to strike.
My father, like a lion in the toils,
Upheaved his head, and, writhing, roar'd with wrath,
And angry shame at this infernal snare.
Almost he rent the blinding nets atwain.
But Clytemnestra on him flung herself,
And caught the steel, and smit him through the ribs.
He slipp'd, and reel'd. She drove the weapon thro',
Piercing the heart!

CHORUS.

O woe! what tale is this?

ELECTRA.

I, too, with him, had died, but for this child,
And that high vengeance which is yet to be.

CHORUS.

Alas! then Agamemnon is no more,
Who stood, but now, amongst us, full of life,
Crown'd with achieving years! The roof, and cope
Of honour, fall'n! Where shall we lift our eyes?
Where set renown? Where garner up our hopes?
All worth is dying out. The land is dark,
And Treason looks abroad in the eclipse.
He did not die the death of men that live
Such life as he lived, fall'n among his peers,
Whom the red battle roll'd away, while yet
The shout of Gods was ringing thro' and thro them;

But Death that fear'd to front him in full field,
Lurk'd by the hearth and smote him from behind.
A mighty man is gone. A mighty grief
Remains. And rumour of undying deeds
For song, and legend, to the end of time!
What tower is strong?

ELECTRA.

O friends — if friends you be —
For who shall say where falsehood festers not,
Those being falsest, who should most be true?
Where is that Phocian? Let him take the boy,
And bear him with him to his master's court.
Else will Ægisthus slay him.

CHORUS.

Orphan'd one,
Fear you not?

ORESTES.

I am Agamemnon's son.

CHORUS.

Therefore should'st fear —

ORESTES.

And therefore cannot fear

PHOCIAN.

I heard a cry. Did any call?

CHORUS.

Oh, well!
You happen this way in the need of time.

ELECTRA.

O loyal stranger, Agamemnon's child
Is fatherless. This boy appeals to you.
O save him, save him from his father's foes!

PHOCIAN.

Unhappy lady, what wild words are these?

ELECTRA.

The house runs blood. Ægisthus, like a fiend,
Is raging loose, his weapon dripping gore.

CHORUS.

The king is dead.

PHOCIAN.

Is dead!

ELECTRA.

Dead.

PHOCIAN.

Do I dream?

ELECTRA.

Such dreams are dreamed in hell — such dreams — oh no?
Is not the earth as solid — heaven above —
The sun in heaven — and Nature at her work —
And men at theirs — the same? Oh, no! no dream!
We shall not wake — nor he; tho' the God [illegible]!
Unnaturally murder'd —

PHOCIAN.

Murder'd!

ELECTRA.

Ay.
And the sun blackens not; the world is green;
The fires of the red west are not put out.
Is not the cricket singing in the grass?
And the shy lizard shooting thro' the leaves?

I hear the ox low in the labour'd field.
Those swallows build, and are as garrulous
High up i' the towers. Yet I speak the truth
By heaven I speak the truth —

PHOCIAN.

Yet more, vouchs. &c.
How died the king?

ELECTRA.

Oh, there shall be a time
For words hereafter. While we dally here,
Fate haunts, and hounds us. Friend, receive this boy.
Bear him to Strophius. All this tragedy
Relate as best you may; it beggars speech.
Tell him a tower of hope is fall'n this day —
A name in Greece —

PHOCIAN.

— But you —

ELECTRA.

Away! away!
Destruction posts apace, while we delay.

PHOCIAN.

Come then!

ELECTRA.

I dare not leave my father's hearth,
For who would then do honour to his urn?
It may be that my womanhood, and youth
May help me here. It may be I shall fall,
And mix my own with Agamemnon's blood.
No matter. On Orestes hangs the hope
Of all this House. Him save for better days,
And ripen'd vengeance.

PHOCIAN.

Noble-hearted one!
Come then, last offspring of this fated race.
The future calls thee!

ORESTES.

Sister! Sister!

ELECTRA.

Go!

ORESTES.

O Sister!

ELECTRA.

O my brother! . . . One last kiss —
One last long kiss — how I have loved thee, boy!
Was it for this I nourish'd thy young years
With stately tales, and legends of the gods?
For this? . . . How the past crowds upon me!
Ah —
Wilt thou recall, in lonely, lonely hours,
How once we sat together on still eves,
(Ah me!) and brooded on all serious themes
Of sweet, and high, and beautiful, and good,
That throng the ancient years. Alcmena's son,
And how his life went out in fire on Œta;
Or of that bright-hair'd wanderer after fame,
That brought the great gold-fleece across the sea,
And left a name in Colchis; or we spake
Of the wise Theseus, councils, kingdoms, thrones,
And laws in distant lands; or, later still,
Of the great leaguer set round Ilion,
And what heart-stirring tidings of the war
Bards brought to Hellas. But when I would breathe
Thy father's name, didst thou not grasp my hand,
And glorious deeds shone round us like the stars

That lit the dark world from a great way off,
And died up into heaven, among the Gods?

ORESTES.

Sister, O Sister!

ELECTRA.

Ah, too long we linger.
Away! away!

PHOCIAN.

Come!

CHORUS.

Heaven go with thee!
To Crissa points the hand of Destiny.

ELECTRA.

O boy, on thee Fate hangs an awful weight
Of retribution! Let thy father's ghost
Forever whisper in thine ear. Be strong.
About thee, yet unborn, thy mother wove
The mystic web of life in such-like form
That Agamemnon's spirit in thine eyes
Seems living yet. His seal is set on thee;
And Pelops' ivory shoulder marks thee his.
Thee, child, nor contests on the Isthmian plain,
Nor sacred apple, nor green laurel-leaf,
But graver deeds await. Forget not, son,
Whose blood, unwash'd, defiles thy mother's doors!

CHORUS.

O haste! I hear a sound within the house.

ELECTRA.

Farewell, then, son of Agamemnon!

PHOCIAN.

Come!

XVIII. ELECTRA. CHORUS. ÆGISTHUS.

ELECTRA.

Gone! gone! Ah saved! . . . Oh fool, thou miss-
est, here!

CHORUS.

Alas, Electra, whither wilt thou go?

ELECTRA.

Touch me not! Come not near me! Let me be!
For this day, which I hoped for, is not mine.

CHORUS.

See how she gathers round her all her robe,
And sits apart with grief. Oh, can it be
Great Agamemnon is among the shades?

ELECTRA.

Would I had grasp'd his skirt, and follow'd him!

CHORUS.

Alas! there is an eminence of joy,
Where Fate grows dizzy, being mounted there,
And so tilts over on the other side!

O fallen, O fallen
The tower, which stood so high!
Whose base, and girth were strong i' the earth,
Whose head was in the sky!
O fall'n that tower of noble power,
That fill'd up every eye!

He stood so sure, that noble tower!
To make secure, and fill with power,
From length to length, the land of Greece!
In whose strong bulwarks all men saw,
Garner'd on the lap of law,

For dearth, or danger, spears of war,
And harvest sheaves of peace!
O fall'n, O fall'n that lofty tower —
The loftiest tower in Greece!

His brows he lift above the noon,
Fill'd with the day, a noble tower!
Who took the sunshine, and the shower,
And flung them back in merry scorn.
Who now shall stand when tempests lower?
He was the first to catch the morn,
The last to see the moon.
O friends, he was a noble tower!
O friends, and fall'n so soon!

Ah, well! lament! lament!
His walls are rent, his bulwarks bent,
And stoop'd that crested eminence,
Which stood so high for our defence!
For our defence — to guard, and fence
From all alarm of hurt and harm,
The fulness of a land's content!
O fall'n away, fall'n at mid-day,
And set before the sun is down,
The highest height of our renown!

O overthrown, the ivory throne!
The spoils of war, the golden crown,
And chiefest honour of the state!
O mourn with me! what tower is free
From over-topping destiny?
What strength is strong to fate?
O mourn with me! when shall we see
Another such, so good, so great?
Another such, to guard the state?

ÆGISTHUS.

He should have staid to shout thro' Troy, or bellow
With bulls in Ida —

CHORUS.

Look! Ægisthus comes!
Like some lean tiger, having dipt in blood
His dripping fangs, and hot athirst for more.
His lurid eye-ball rolls, as tho' it swam
Thro' sanguine films. He staggers, drunk with rage
And crazy mischief.

ÆGISTHUS.

Hold! let no one stir!
I charge you, all of you, who hear me speak
Where may the boy Orestes lie concealed?
I hold the life of each in gage for his.
If any know where now he hides from us,
Let him beware, not rendering true reply!

CHORUS.

The boy is fled —

ELECTRA.

— is saved!

ÆGISTHUS.

Electra here!
How mean you? What is this?

ELECTRA.

Enough is left
Of Agamemnon's blood to drown you in.

ÆGISTHUS.

You shall not trifle with me, by my beard!
There's peril in this pastime. Where's the boy?

ELECTRA.

Half-way to Phocis, Heaven helping him.

ÆGISTHUS.

By the black Styx!

ELECTRA.

Take not the oath of Gods,
Who art but half a man, blaspheming coward!

ÆGISTHUS.

But you, by Heaven, if this be a sword,
Shall not be any more —

ELECTRA.

A slave to thee,
Blundering bloodshedder, tho' thou boast thyself
As huge as Ossa piled on Pelion,
Or anything but that weak wretch thou art!
Oh, thou hast only half done thy black work!
Thou shouldst have slain the young lion with the old.
Look that he come not back, and find himself
Ungiven food, and still the lion's share!

ÆGISTHUS.

Insolent! but I know to seal thy lips —

ELECTRA.

— For thou art only strong among the weak.
We know thou hast an aptitude for blood.
To take a woman's is an easy task,
And one well worthy thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

Oh, but for words!

ELECTRA.

Yet, couldst thou feed on all the noble blood
Of god-like generations on this earth,
It should not help thee to a hero's heart.

CHORUS.

O peace, Electra, but for pity's sake!
Heap not his madness to such dangerous heights.

ELECTRA.

I will speak out my heart's scorn, tho' I die.

ÆGISTHUS.

And thou shalt die, but not till I have tamed
That stubborn spirit to a wish for life.

CHORUS.

O cease, infatuate! I hear the Queen.

[*By a movement of the Eccyclema the palace is thrown open, and discovers* CLYTEMNESTRA *standing over the body of* AGAMEMNON.

XIX. CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS. ÆGISTHUS. ELECTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Argives! behold the man who was your King!

CHORUS.

Dead! dead!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not I, but Fate hath dealt this blow.

CHORUS.

Dead! dead, alas! look where he lies, O friends!
That noble head, and to be brought so low!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He who set light by woman, with blind scorn,
And held her with the beasts we sacrifice,
Lies, by a woman sacrificed himself.
This is high justice which appeals to you.

CHORUS.

Alas! alas! I know not words for this

CLYTEMNESTRA.

We are but as the instrument of heaven.
Our work is not design, but destiny.
A God directs the lightning to its fall;
It smites and slays, and passes other-where,
Pure in its self, as when, in light, it left
The bosom of Olympus, to its end.
In this cold heart the wrong of all the past
Lies buried. I avenged, and I forgive.
Honour him yet. He is a king, tho' fallen.

CHORUS.

Oh, how she sets Virtue's own crest on Crime,
And stands there stern as Fate's wild arbi
tress!
Not any deed could make her less than great.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *descends the steps, and lays her hand on the arm of* ÆGISTHUS.)

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Put up the sword! Enough of blood is spilt.

ÆGISTHUS.

Hist! Oh, not half — Orestes is escaped.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Sufficient for the future be that thought.
What's done is well done. What's undone — yet
more:
Some thing still saved from crime.

ÆGISTHUS.

This lion's whelp
Will work some mischief yet.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He is a child —
— Our own — we will but war upon the strong.
Not upon infants. Let this matter rest.

ÆGISTHUS.

Oh, ever, in the wake of thy great will
Let me steer sure! and we will leave behind
Great tracks of light upon the wondering world.
If but you err not here —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

These pale-eyed groups!
See how they huddle shuddering, and stand round;
As when some mighty beast, the brindled lord
Of the rough woodside, sends his wild death-roar
Up the shrill caves, the meaner denizens
Of ancient woods, shy deer, and timorous hares,
Peer from the hairy thickets, and shrink back.
We fear'd the lion, and we smote him down.
Now fear is over. Shall we turn aside
To harry jackalls? Laugh! we have not laugh'd
So long, I think you have forgotten how!
Have we no right to laugh like other men?
Ha! Ha! I laugh. Now it is time to laugh!

CHORUS.

O awful sight! Look where the bloody sun,
As tho' with Agamemnon he were slain,
Runs reeking, lurid, down the palace floors!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O my belov'd! Now will we reign sublime,
And set our foot upon the neck of Fortune!
And, for the rest — oh, much remains! — For you,
(*To the* Chorus.)
A milder sway, if mildly you submit
To our free service and supremacy.
Nor tax, nor toll, to carry dim results
Of distant war beyond the perilous seas.
But gateless justice in our halls of state,
And peace in all the borders of our land!
For you —

(*To* ELECTRA, *who has thrown herself upon the body of* AGAMEMNON.)

ELECTRA.

Oh, hush! What more remains to me,
But this dead hand, whose clasp is cold in mine?
And all the baffled memory of the past,
Buried with him? What more?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

—A mother's heart,
If you will come to it. Free confidence.
A liberal share in all our future hope.
Now, more than ever—mutually weak—
We stand in need, each of the other's love.
Our love! it shall not sacrifice thee, child,
To wanton whims of war, as he, of old,
Did thy dead sister. If you will not these,
But answer love with scorn, why then—

ELECTRA.

—What then?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Safe silence. And permission to forget.

XX. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS. CLYTEMNESTRA CASSANDRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CHORUS.

What shall we say? What has been done?
Shed no tear! Oh, shed no tear!
Hang up his harness in the sun;
The hookéd car, and barbéd spear;
And all war's adamantine gear
Of trophied spoils; for all his toils
Are over, alas! are over, and done!
What shall we say? what has been done?
Shed no tear! O, shed no tear!
But keep solemn silence all,

As befits when heroes fall;
Solemn as his fame is; sad
As his end was; earth shall wear
Mourning for him. See, the sun
Blushes red for what is done!
And the wild stars, one by one,
Peer out of the lurid air,
And shrink back with awe, and fear,
Shuddering, for what is done.
When the night comes, dark, and dun,
As our sorrow; blackness far
Shutting out the crimson sun;
Turn his face to the moon, and star, —
These are bright as his glories are —
And great Heaven shall see its son!
What shall we say? what has been done?
Shed no tear! oh, shed no tear!
Gather round him, friends! Look here!
All the wreaths which he hath won
In the race that he hath run —
Laurel garlands, every one!
These are things to think upon,
Mourning till the set of sun —
Till the mourning moon appear.
Now the wreaths which Fame begun
To uplift, to crown his head,
Memory shall seize upon,
And make chaplets for his bier.
He shall have wreaths tho' he be dead!
But his monument is here,
Built up in our hearts, and dear
To all honour. Shed no tear!
Oh, let not any tear be shed!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look at Cassandra! she is stooping down.

SEMI-CHORUS.

She dips and moves her fingers in the blood!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look to her! There's a wildness in her eye!

SEMI-CHORUS.

What does she?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Oh, in Agamemnon's blood,
She hath writ *Orestes* on the palace steps!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ægisthus!

ÆGISTHUS.

Queen and bride!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

We have not fail'd

CHORUS.

Come, venerable, ancient Night!
From sources of the western stars,
In darkest shade that fits this woe.
Consoler of a thousand griefs,
And likest death unalterably calm.
We toil, aspire, and sorrow,
And in a little while shall cease.
For we know not whence we came,
And who can ensure the morrow?
Thou, eternally the same,
From of old, in endless peace
Eternally survivest;
Enduring on thro' good and ill,
Coëval with the Gods: and still
In thine own silence livest.
Our days thou leadest home
To the great Whither which has no Again!
Impartially to pleasure and to pain
Thou sett'st the bourne. To thee shall all things come.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But, if he cease to love me, what is gain'd?

CASSANDRA.

With wings darkly spreading,
Like ravens to the carcass
Scenting far off the savour of blood,
From shores of the unutterable River,
They gather and swoop,
They waver, they darken.
From the fangs that raven,
From the eyes that glare
Intolerably fierce,
Save me, Apollo!
Ai! Ai! Ai!
Alinon! Alinon!
Blood, blood! and of kindred nature,
Which the young wolf returning
Shall dip his fangs in,
Thereby accursedly
Imbibing madness!

CHORUS.

The wild woman is uttering strange things
Fearful to listen to.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Within the House
Straightway confine her,
There to learn wisdom.

ÆGISTHUS.

Orestes — oh, this child's life now outweighs
That mighty ruin, Agamemnon dead!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ægisthus, dost thou love me?

ÆGISTHUS.

As my life!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thou lovest me! O love, we have not fail'd.
Give me thy hand. So . . . lead me to the House
Let me lean on thee. I am very weak.

CHORUS.

Only Heaven is high.
Only the Gods are great.
Above the searchless sky,
In unremovéd state,
They from their golden mansions,
Look over the lands, and the seas;
The ocean's wide expansions,
And the earth's varieties:
Secure of their supremacy,
And sure of affluent ease.
Who shall say "I stand!" nor fall?
Destiny is over all!
Rust will crumble old renown.
Bust and column tumble down;
Keep, and castle; tower, and town;
Throne, and sceptre; crest and crown.
Destiny is over all!
One by one, the pale guests fall
At lighted feast, in palace hall;
And feast is turn'd to funeral.
Who shall say "I stand!" nor fall?
Destiny is over all.

GOOD-NIGHT IN THE PORCH.

A LITTLE longer in the light, love, let me be.
The air is warm.
I hear the cuckoo's last good-night float from the
copse below the Farm.

A little longer, Sister sweet — your hand in mine
— on this old seat.

In yon red gable, which the rose creeps round and
o'er, your casement shines
Against the yellow west, o'er those forlorn and
solitary pines.
The long, long day is nearly done. How silent
all the place is grown!

The stagnant levels, one and all, are burning in
the distant marsh —
Hark! 'twas the bittern's parting call. The frogs
are out: with murmurs harsh
The low reeds vibrate. See! the sun catches the
long pools one by one.

A moment, and those orange flats will turn dead
gray or lurid white.
Look up! o'erhead the winnowing bats are come
and gone, eluding sight.
The little worms are out. The snails begin to
move down shining trails,

With slow pink cones, and soft wet horns. The
garden-bowers are dim with dew.
With sparkling drops the white-rose thorns are
twinkling, where the sun slips thro'
Those reefs of coral buds hung free below the
purple Judas-tree.

From the warm upland comes a gust made fra-
grant with the brown hay there.
The meek cows, with their white horns thrust
above the hedge, stand still and stare.
The steaming horses from the wains droop o'er
the tank their plaited manes.

And o'er yon hill-side brown and barren (where
you and I as children play'd,

Starting the rabbit to his warren), I hear the
sandy, shrill cascade
Leap down upon the vale, and spill his heart out
round the muffled mill.

O can it be for nothing only that God has shown
his world to me?
Or but to leave the heart more lonely with loss
of beauty . . . can it be?
O closer, closer, Sister dear . . . nay, I have kist
away that tear.

God bless you, Dear, for that kind thought which
only upon tears could rise!
God bless you for the love that sought to hide
them in those drooping eyes,
Whose lids I kiss! . . . poor lids, so red! but let
my kiss fall there instead.

Yes sad indeed it seems, each night — and sadder,
Dear, for your sweet sake!
To watch the last low lingering light, and know
not where the morn may break.
To-night we sit together here. To-morrow night
will come . . . . ah, where?

O child! howe'er assured be faith, to say farewell
is fraught with gloom,
When, like one flower, the germs of death and
genius ripen toward the tomb;
And earth each day, as some fond face at part
ing, gains a graver grace.

There's not a flower, there's not a tree in this old
garden where we sit,
But what some fragrant memory is closed and
folded up in it.
To-night the dog-rose smells as wild, as fresh, as
when I was a child.

'Tis eight years since (do you forget?) we set
those lilies near the wall:
You were a blue-eyed child: even yet I seem to
see the ringlets fall —
The golden ringlets, blown behind your shoulders
in the merry wind.

Ah, me! old times, they cling, they cling! And
oft by yonder green old gate
The field shows thro', in morns of spring, an
eager boy, I paused elate
With all sweet fancies loos'd from school. And
oft, you know, when eves were cool,

In summer-time, and thro' the trees young gnats
began to be about,
With some old book upon your knees 'twas here
you watch'd the stars come out.
While oft, to please me, you sang thro' some fool-
ish song I made for you.

And there's my epic — I began when life seem'd
long, tho' longer art —
And all the glorious deeds of man made golden
riot in my heart —
Eight books . . . it will not number nine! I die
before my heroine.

Sister! they say that drowning men in one wild
moment can recall
Their whole life long, and feel again the pain —
the bliss — that throng'd it all: —
Last night those phantoms of the Past again
came crowding round me fast.

Near morning, when the lamp was low, against
the wall they seem'd to flit;
And, as the wavering light would glow or fall,
they came and went with it.

The ghost of boyhood seem'd to gaze down the
dark verge of vanisht days.

Once more the garden where she walk'd on sum-
mer eves to tend her flowers,
Once more the lawn where first we talk'd of fu-
ture years in twilight hours
Arose; once more she seem'd to pass before me
in the waving grass

To that old terrace; her bright hair about her
warm neck all undone,
And waving on the balmy air, with tinges of the
dying sun.
Just one star kindling in the west: just one bird
singing near its nest.

So lovely, so beloved! Oh, fair as tho' that sun
had never set
Which staid upon her golden hair, in dreams I
seem to see her yet!
To see her in that old green place — the same
husht, smiling, cruel face!

A little older, love, than you are now; and I was
then a boy;
And wild and wayward-hearted too; to her my
passion was a toy,
Soon broken! ah, a foolish thing — a butterfly
with crumpled wing!

Her hair, too, was like yours — as bright, but
with a warmer golden tinge:
Her eyes — a somewhat deeper light, and dream'd
below a longer fringe:
And still that strange grave smile she had stays
in my heart and keeps it sad!

There's no one knows it, truest friend, but you
for I have never breath'd

To other ears the frozen end of those spring-garlands Hope once wreath'd;
And death will come before again I breathe that name untouch'd by pain.

From little things — a star, a flower — that touch'd us with the self-same thought,
My passion deepen'd hour by hour, until to that fierce heat 'twas wrought,
Which, shrivelling over every nerve, crumbled the outworks of reserve.

I told her then, in that wild time, the love I knew she long had seen;
The accusing pain that burn'd like crime, yet left me nobler than I had been;
What matter with what words I woo'd her? She said I had misunderstood her.

And something more — small matter what! of friendship something — sister's love —
She said that I was young — knew not my own heart — as the years would prove —
She wish'd me happy — she conceived an interest in me — and believed

I should grow up to something great — and soon forget her — soon forget
This fancy — and congratulate my life she had released it, yet —
With more such words — a lie! a lie! She broke my heart, and flung it by!

A life's libation lifted up, from her proud lip she dash'd untasted:
There trampled lay love's costly cup, and in the dust the wine was wasted.
She knew I could not pour such wine again at any other shrine.

Then I remember a numb mood: mad murmurings of the words she said:
A slow shame smouldering through my blood; that surged and sung within my head:
And drunken sunlights reeling thro' the leaves: above, the burnish't blue

Hot on my eyes — a blazing shield: a noise among the waterfalls:
A free crow up the brown cornfield floating a will: faint shepherd-calls:
And reapers reaping in the shocks of gold: and girls with purple frocks:

All which the more confused my brain: and nothing could I realize
But the great fact of my own pain: I saw the fields: I heard the cries:
The crow's shade dwindled up the hill: the world went on: my heart stood still.

I thought I held in my hot hand my life crusht up: I could have tost
The crumpled riddle from me, and laugh'd loud to think what I had lost.
A bitter strength was in my mind: like Samson, when she scorned him — blind,

And casting reckless arms about the props of life to hug them down —
A madman with his eyes put out. But all my anger was my own.
I spared the worm upon my walk: I left the white rose on its stalk.

All's over long since. Was it strange that I was mad with grief and shame?
And I would cross the seas, and change my ancient home, my father's name?

In the wild hope, if that might be, to change my
own identity!

I know that I was wrong: I know it was not well
to be so wild.
But the scorn stung so! . . . Pity now could
wound not! . . . I have seen her child:
It had the self-same eyes she had: their gazing
almost made me mad.

Dark violet eyes whose glances, deep with April-
hints of sunny tears,
'Neath long soft lashes laid asleep, seem'd all too
thoughtful for her years;
As tho' from mine her gaze had caught the secret
of some mournful thought.

But, when she spoke her father's air broke o'er
her . . . that clear confident voice!
Some happy souls there are, that wear their na-
ture lightly; these rejoice
The world by living; and receive from all men
more than what they give.

One handful of their buoyant chaff exceeds our
hoards of careful grain:
Because their love breaks thro' their laugh, while
ours is fraught with tender pain:
The world, that knows itself too sad, is proud to
keep some faces glad:

And, so it is! from such an one Misfortune softly
steps aside
To let him still walk in the sun. These things
must be. I cannot chide.
Had I been she I might have made the selfsame
choice. She shunn'd the shade.

To some men God hath given laughter: but tears
to some men He hath given:

He bade us sow in tears, hereafter to harvest
holier smiles in Heaven:
And tears and smiles, they are His gift: both
good, to smite or to uplift:

He knows His sheep: the wind and showers beat
not too sharply the shorn lamb:
His wisdom is more wise than ours: He knew my
nature — what I am:
Ie tempers smiles with tears: both good, to bear
in time the Christian mood.

O yet — in scorn of mean relief, let Sorrow bear
her heavenly fruit!
Better the wildest hour of grief than the low pas-
time of the brute!
Better to weep, for He wept too, than laugh as
every fool can do!

For sure, 'twere best to bear the cross; nor
lightly fling the thorns behind;
Lest we grow happy by the loss of what was
noblest in the mind.
— Here — in the ruins of my years — Father, I
bless Thee thro' these tears!

It was in the far foreign lands this sickness came
upon me first.
Below strange suns, 'mid alien hands this fever
of the south was nurst,
Until it reach'd some vital part. I die not of a
broken heart.

O think not that! If I could live . . . there's
much to live for — worthy life.
It is not for what fame could give — tho' that I
scorn not — but the strife
Were noble for its own sake too. I thought that
I had much to do —

But God is wisest! Hark, again! . . . 'twas yon
black bittern, as he rose
Against the wild light o'er the fen. How red
your little casement glows!
The night falls fast. How lonely, Dear, this
bleak old house will look next year!

So sad a thought? . . . ah, yes! I know it is not
good to brood on this:
And yet — such thoughts will come and go, un-
bidden. 'Tis that you should miss,
My darling, one familiar tone of this weak voice
when I am gone.

And, for what's past — I will not say in what she
did that all was right,
But all's forgiven; and I pray for her heart's
welfare, day and night.
All things are changed! This cheek would glow
even near hers but faintly now!

Thou — God! before whose sleepless eye not even
in vain the sparrows fall,
Receive, sustain me! Sanctify my soul. Thou
know'st, Thou lovest all.
Too weak to walk alone — I see Thy hand: I
falter back to Thee.

Saved from the curse of time which throws its
baseness on us day by day:
Its wretched joys, and worthless woes; till all th
heart is worn away.
I feel Thee near. I hold my breath, by the half-
open doors of Death.

And sometimes, glimpses from within of glory
(wondrous sight and sound!)
Float near me: — faces pure from sin; strange
music; saints with splendor crown'd:

I seem to feel my native air blow down from
some high region there,

And fan my spirit pure: I rise above the sense
of loss and pain:
Faint forms that lured my childhood's eyes, long
lost, I seem to find again:
I see the end of all: I feel hope. awe, no lan
guage can reveal.

Forgive me, Lord, if overmuch I loved that form
Thou mad'st so fair;
I know that Thou didst make her such; and fair
but as the flowers were —
Thy work: her beauty was but Thine; the hu-
man less than the divine.

My life hath been one search for Thee 'mid
thorns found red with Thy dear blood:
In many a dark Gethsemanë I seem'd to stand
where Thou hadst stood:
And, scorn'd in this world's Judgment-Place, at
times, thro' tears, to catch Thy face.

Thou suffered'st here, and didst not fail: Thy
bleeding feet these paths have trod:
But Thou wert strong, and I am frail: and I am
man, and Thou wert God.
Be near me: keep me in Thy sight: or lay my
soul asleep in light.

O to be where the meanest mind is more than
Shakespeare! where one look
Shows more than here the wise can find, tho' toil-
ing slow from book to book!
Where life is knowlędge: love is sure: and hope's
brief promise made secure.

O dying voice of human praise! the crude ambi-
tions of my youth!

I long to pour immortal lays! great pæans of
perennial Truth!
A larger work! a loftier aim! . . . and what are
laurel-leaves, and fame?

And what are words? How little these the
silence of the soul express!
Mere froth — the foam and flower of seas whose
hungering waters heave and press
Against the planets and the sides of night —
mute, yearning, mystic tides!

To ease the heart with song is sweet: sweet to
be heard if heard by love.
And you have heard me. When we meet shall
we not sing the old songs above
To grander music? Sweet, one kiss. O blest it
is to die like this!

To lapse from being without pain: your hand in
mine, on mine your heart:
The unshaken faith to meet again that sheaths
the pang with which we part:
My head upon your bosom, sweet: your hand in
mine, on this old seat!

So; closer wind that tender arm . . . How the
hot tears fall! Do not weep,
Belov'd, but let your smile stay warm about me.
"In the Lord they sleep."
You know the words the Scripture saith . . . O
light, O Glory! . . . is this death?

THE EARL'S RETURN.

Ragged and tall stood the castle wall
And the squires, at their sport, in the great South
Court,

Lounged all day long from stable to hall
Laughingly, lazily, one and all.
The land about was barren and blue,
And swept by the wing of the wet sea-mew.
Seven fishermen's huts on a shelly shore:
Sand-heaps behind, and sand-banks before:
And a black champaigne streaked white all thro'
To a great salt pool which the ocean drew,
Suck'd into itself, and disgorged it again
To stagnate and steam on the mineral plain;
Not a tree or a bush in the circle of sight,
But a bare black thorn which the sea-winds had wither'd
With the drifting scum of the surf and blight,
And some patches of gray grass-land to the right,
Where the lean red-hided cattle were tether'd:
A reef of rock wedged the water in twain,
And a stout stone tower stood square to the main.

And the flakes of the spray that were jerk'd away
From the froth on the lip of the bleak blue sea
Were sometimes flung by the wind, as it swung
Over turret and terrace and balcony,
To the garden below where, in desolate corners
Under the mossy green parapet there,
The lilies crouch'd, rocking their white heads like mourners,
And burn'd off the heads of the flowers that were
Pining and pale in their comfortless bowers,
Dry-bush'd with the sharp stubborn lavender,
And paven with disks of the torn sun-flowers,
Which, day by day, were strangled, and stripp'd
Of their ravelling fringes and brazen bosses,
And the hardy mary-buds nipp'd and ripp'd
Into shreds for the beetles that lurk'd in the mosses.

Here she lived alone, and from year to year
She saw the black belt of the ocean appear

At her casement each morn as she rose; and each morn
Her eye fell first on the bare black thorn.
This was all: nothing more: or sometimes on the shore
The fishermen sang when the fishing was o'er;
Or the lowing of oxen fell dreamily,
Close on the shut of the glimmering eves,
Thro' some gusty pause in the moaning sea,
When the pools were splash'd pink by the thirsty beeves.
Or sometimes, when the pearl-lighted morns drew the tinges
Of the cold sunrise up their amber fringes,
A white sail peer'd over the rim of the main,
Look'd all about o'er the empty sea,
Stagger'd back from the fine line of white light again,
And dropp'd down to another world silently.
Then she breath'd freer. With sickening dread
She had watch'd five pale young moons unfold
From their notchy cavern in light, and spread
To the fuller light, and again grow old,
And dwindle away to a luminous shred.
"He will not come back till the Spring's green and gold.
"And I would that I with the leaves were dead,
"Quiet somewhere with them in the moss and the mould,
"When he and the summer come this way," she said.

And when the dull sky darken'd down to the edges,
And the keen frost kindled in star and spar,
The sea might be known by a noise on the ledges
Of the long crags, gathering power from afar
Thro' his roaring bays, and crawling back
Hissing, as o'er the wet pebbles he dragg'd
His skirt of foam fray'd, dripping, and jagg'd,

And reluctantly fell down the smooth hollow shel
Of the night, whose lustrous surface of black
In spots to an intense blue was worn.
But later, when up on the sullen sea-bar
The wide large-lighted moon had arisen,
Where the dark and voluminous ocean g, w
luminous,
Helping after her slowly one little shy star
That shook blue in the cold, and look'd forlorn,
The clouds were troubled, and the wind from his
prison
Behind them leap'd down with a light laugh of
scorn;
Then the last thing she saw was that bare black
thorn;
For the forkéd tree as the bleak blast took it,
Howl'd thro' it, and beat it, and bit it, and shook
it,
Seem'd to visibly waste and wither and wizen.

And the snow was lifted into the air
Layer by layer,
And turn'd into vast white clouds that flew
Silent and fleet up the sky, and were riven
And jerk'd into chasms which the sun leap'd
thro',
Opening crystal gulfs of a breezy blue
Fed with rainy lights of the April heaven.
From eaves and leaves the quivering dew
Sparkled off; and the rich earth, black and bare,
Was starr'd with snow-drops everywhere;
And the crocus upturn'd its flame, and burn'd
Here and there.
"The Summer," she said, "cometh blithe and
bold;
And the crocus is lit for her welcoming;
And the days will have garments of purple and
gold;
But I would be left by the pale green Spring

With the snow-drops somewhere under the mould;
"For I dare not think what the Summer may bring."

Pale she was as the bramble blooms
That fill the long fields with their faint perfumes,
When the May-wind flits finely thro' sun-threaded showers,
Breathing low to himself in his dim meadow-bowers.
And her cheek each year was paler and thinner,
And white as the pearl that was hung at her ear,
As her sad heart sicken'd and pined within her,
And fail'd and fainted from year to year.
So that the Seneschal, rough and gray,
Said, as he look'd in her face one day,
"St. Catherine save all good souls I pray,
For our pale young lady is paling away.
O the Saints," he said, smiling bitter and grim,
"Know she's too fair and too good for him!"
Sometimes she walk'd on the upper leads,
And lean'd on the arm of the weather-worn Warden.
Sometimes she sat 'twixt the mildewy beds
Of the sea-singed flowers in the Pleasaunce Garden.
Till the rotting blooms that lay thick on the walks
Were comb'd by the white sea-gust like a rake,
And the stimulant steam of the leaves and stalks
Made the coiléd memory, numb and cold,
That slept in her heart like a dreaming snake,
Drowsily lift itself fold by fold,
And gnaw and gnaw hungrily, half-awake.

Sometimes she look'd from the window below
To the great South Court, and the squires, at their sport,

Loungingly loitering to and fro.
She heard the grooms there as they curs'd one another.
She heard the great bowls falling all day long
In the bowling alleys. She heard the song
Of the shock-headed Pages that drank without stint in
The echoing courts, and swore hard at each other.
She saw the red face of the rough wooden Quintin,
And the swinging sand-bag ready to smother
The awkward Squire that miss'd the mark.
And, all day long, between the dull noises
Of the bowls, and the oaths, and the singing voices,
The sea boom'd hoarse till the skies were dark.

But when the swallow, that sweet new-comer,
Floated over the sea in the front of the summer,
The salt dry sands burn'd white, and sicken'd
Men's sight in the glaring horn of the bay;
And all things that fasten, or float at ease
In the silvery light of the leprous seas
With the pulse of a hideous life were quicken'd,
Fell loose from the rocks, and crawl'd crosswise away,
Slippery sidelong crabs, half strangled
By the white sea grasses in which they were tangled,
And those half-living creatures, orb'd, ray'd, and sharp-angled,
Fan-fish, and star-fish, and polypous lumps,
Hueless and boneless, that languidly thicken'd,
Or flat-faced, or spiked, or ridged with humps,
Melting off from their clotted clusters and clumps,
Sprawl'd over the shore in the heat of the day.

An hour before the sun was set
A darker ripple roll'd over the sea;

The white rocks quiver'd in wells of jet;
And the great West, opening breathlessly
Up all his inmost orange, gave
Hints of something distant and sweet
That made her heart swell; far up the wave
The clouds that lay piled in the golden heat
Were turn'd into types of the ancient mountains
In an ancient land; the weeds, which forlorn
Waves were swaying neglectfully,
By their sound, as they dipp'd into sparkles that dripp'd
In the emerald creeks that ran up from the shore,
Brought back to her fancy the bubble of fountains
Leaping and falling continually
In valleys where she should wander no more.

And when, over all of these, the night
Among her mazy and milk-white signs,
And cluster'd orbs, and zig-zag lines,
Burst into blossom of stars and light,
The sea was glassy; the glassy brine
Was paven with lights — blue, crystalline,
And emerald keen; the dark world hung
Balanced under the moon, and swung
In a net of silver sparkles. Then she
Rippled her yellow hair to her knee,
Bared her warm white bosom and throat,
And from the lattice lean'd athirst.
There, on the silence did she gloat
With a dizzy pleasure steep'd in pain,
Half catching the soul of the secret that blended
God with his starlight, then feeling it vain,
Like a pining poet ready to burst
With the weight of the wonder that grows in his brain,
Or a nightingale, mute at the sound of a lute
That is swelling and breaking his heart with its strain,

Waiting, breathless, to die when the music is ended.
For the sleek and beautiful midnight stole,
Like a faithless friend, her secret care,
Crept thro' each pore to the source of the soul,
And mock'd at the anguish which he found there,
Shining away from her, scornful and fair
In his pitiless beauty, refusing to share
The discontent which he could not control.

The water-rat, as he skulk'd in the moat,
Set all the slumbrous lilies afloat,
And sent a sharp quick pulse along
The stagnant light, that heaved and swung
The leaves together. Suddenly
At times a shooting star would spin
Shell-like out of heaven, and tumble in,
And burst o'er a city of stars; but she,
As he dash'd on the back of the zodiac,
And quiver'd and glow'd down arc and node,
And split sparkling into infinity,
Thought that some angel, in his reveries
Thinking of earth, as he pensively
Lean'd over the star-grated balcony
In his palace among the Pleiades,
And grieved for the sorrow he saw in the land,
Had dropp'd a white lily from his loose hand.

And thus many a night, steep'd pale in the light
Of the stars, when the bells and clocks
Had ceased in the towers, and the sound of the hours
Was eddying about in the rocks,
Deep-sunken in bristling broidery between the black oak Fiends sat she,
And under the moth-flitted canopy
Of the mighty antique bed in her chamber,

With wild eyes drinking up the sea, and her
white hands heavy with jewelry,
Flashing as she loosed languidly
Her satins of snow and of amber.
And as, fold by fold, these were rippled and roll'd
To her feet, and lay huddled in ruins of gold,
She look'd like some pale spirit above
Earth's dazzling passions forever flung by,
Free'd from the stains of an earthly love,
And those splendid shackles of pride that press
On the heart till it aches with the gorgeous stress,
Quitting the base Past remorsefully.
And so she put by the coil and care
Of the day that lay furl'd like an idle weft
Of heapéd spots which a bright snake hath left,
Or that dark house, the blind worm's lair,
When the star-wingéd moth from the windows
hath crept,
Steep'd her soul in a tearful prayer,
Shrank into her naked self, and slept.

And as she slumber'd, starr'd and eyed
All over with angry gems, at her side,
The Fiends in the oak kept ward and watch;
And the querulous clock, on its rusty catch,
With a quick tick, husky and thick,
Clamour'd and clack'd at her sharply.
There was
(Fronting a portrait of the Earl)
A shrine with a dim green lamp, and a cross
Of glowing cedar wreath'd with pearl,
Which the Arimathæan, so it was writ,
When he came from the holy Orient,
Had worn, with his prayers embalming it,
As with the San-Grael thro' the world he went.
Underneath were relics and gems
From many an antique king-saint's crown,
And some ('twas avouch'd) from the dusk diadems
And mighty rings of those Wise Kings

That evermore sleep 'mid the marble stems,
Twixt chancel and chalice in God his palace,
The marvel of Cologne Town.
In a halo dim of the lamp all night
Smiled the sad Virgin, holy and white,
With a face as full of the soul's affliction
As one that had look'd on the Crucifixion.

At moon-rise the land was suddenly brighter;
And thro' all its length and breadth the casement
Grew large with a luminnus strange amazement
And, as doubting in dreams what that sudden
blaze meant,
The Lady's white face turn'd a thought whiter.

Sometimes in sleep light finger-tips
Touch'd her behind; the pain, the bliss
Of a long slow despairing kiss
Doubled the heat on her feverish lips,
And down to her heart's-heart smouldering burn'd,
From lips long mute she heard her name;
Sad dreams and sweet to vex her came;
Sighing, upon her pillow she turn'd,
Like a weary waif on a weary sea
That is heaving over continually,
And finds no course, until for its sake
The heart of the silence begins to ache.
Unsooth'd from slumber she awoke
An hour ere dawn. The lamp burn'd faint.
The Fiends glared at her out of the oak.
She rose, and fell at the shrine of the Saint.
There with claspéd hands to the Mother
Of many sorrows, in sorrow, she pray'd;
Till all things in the room melted into each other,
And vanish'd in gyres of flickering shade,
Leaving her all alone, with the face
Of the Saint growing large in its one bright place.
Then on a sudden, from far, a fear
Thro' all her heart its horror drew,

As of something hideous growing near.
Cold fingers seem'd roaming thro' her damp hair
Her lips were lock'd. The power of prayer
Left her. She dared not turn. She knew,
From his panel atilt on the wall up there,
The grim Earl was gazing her thro' and thro'.

But when the casement, a grisly square,
Flicker'd with day, she flung it wide,
And look'd below. The shore was bare.
In the mist tumbled the dismal tide.
One ghastly pool seem'd solid white;
The forkéd shadow of the thorn
Fell thro' it, like a raven rent
In the steadfast blank down which it went.
The blind world slowly gather'd sight.
The sea was moaning on to morn.

And the Summer into the Autumn waned.
And under the watery Hyades
The gray sea swell'd, and the thick sky rain'd,
And the land was darken'd by slow degrees.

But oft, in the low West, the day
Smouldering sent up a sullen flame
Along the dreary waste of gray,
As tho' in that red region lay,
Heap'd up, like Autumn weeds and flowers
For fire, its thorny fruitless hours,
And God said, "burn it all away!"

When all was dreariest in the skies,
And the gusty tract of twilight mutter'd,
A strange slow smile grew into her eyes,
As tho' from a great way off it came
And was weary ere down to her lips it flutter'd,
And turn'd into a sigh, or some soft name
Whose syllables sounded likest sighs,
Half smother'd in sorrow before they were utter'd

Sometimes, at night, a music was roll'd —
A ripple of silver harp-strings cold —
From the halls below where the Minstrel sung,
With the silver hair, and the golden tongue,
And the eyes of passionless, peaceful blue
(Like twilight which faint stars gaze thro',)
Wise with the years which no man knew.
And first the music, as tho' the wings
Of some blind angel were caught in the strings,
Flutter'd with weak endeavour: anon
The uncaged heart of music grew bold
And cautiously loosen'd, length by length,
The golden cone of its great under-tone,
Like a strong man using mild language to one
That is weaker, because he is sure of his strength

But once — and it was at the fall of the day,
When she, if she closed her eyes, did seem
To be wandering far, in a sort of dream,
With some lost shadow, away, away,
Down the heart of a golden land which she
Remember'd a great way over the sea,
There came a trample of horses and men;
And a blowing of horns at the Castle-Gate;
Then a clattering noise; then a pause; and then,
With the sudden jerk of a heavy weight,
And a wrangling and jangling and clinking and
clanking,
The sound of the falling of cable and chain;
And a grumbling over the dewy planking
That shriek'd and sung with the weight and strain;
And the rough Seneschal bawl'd out in the hall
'The Earl and the Devil are come back again!"

Her heart stood still for a moment or more.
Then suddenly tugg'd, and strain'd, and tore
At the roots, which seem'd to give way beneath.
She rush'd to the window, and held her breath.
High up on the beach were the long black ships

And the brown sails hung from the masts in strips;
And the surf was whirl'd over and over them,
And swept them dripping from stern to stem.
Within, in the great square court below,
Were a hundred rough-faced men, or so.
And one or two pale fair-hair'd slaves
Which the Earl had brought over the winter waves.

There was a wringing of horny hands;
And a swearing of oaths; and a great deal of laughter;
The grim Earl growling his hoarse commands
To the Warden that follow'd him growling after;
A lowing of cattle along the wet sands;
And a plashing of hoofs on the slippery rafter,
As the long-tail'd black-maned horses each
Went over the bridge from the gray sea-beach.

Then quoth the grim Earl, "fetch me a stoop!"
And they brought him a great bowl that dripp'd from the brim,
Which he seiz'd upon with a satisfied whoop,
Drain'd, and flung at the head of him
That brought it; then, with a laugh like a howl,
Strok'd his beard; and strode in thro' the door with a growl.

Meanwhile the pale lady grew white and whiter,
As the poplar pales when the keen winds smite her:
And, as the tree sways to the gust, and heaves
Quick ripples of white alarm up the leaves,
So did she seem to shrink and reel
From the casement — one quiver from head to heel
Of whitest fear. For she heard below,
On the creaking stairway loud and slow,

Like drops that plunge audibly down from the thunder
Into a sea that is groaning under,
The heavy foot of the Earl as he mounted
Step after step to the turret: she counted
Step after step, as he hasten'd or halted;
Now clashing shrill thro' the archways vaulted;
Now muffled and thick; now loud, and more
Loud as he came near the Chamber door.
Then there fell, with a rattle and shock,
An iron glove on the iron lock,
And the door burst open—the Earl burst thro' it—
But she saw him not. The window-pane,
Far off, grew large and small again;
The staggering light did wax and wane,
Till there came a snap of the heavy brain;
And a slow-subsiding pulse of pain;
And the whole world darken'd into rest,
As the grim Earl press'd to his grausome breast
His white wife. She hung heavy there
On his shoulder without breath,
Darkly fill'd with sleepy death
From her heart up to her eyes;
Dead asleep: and ere he knew it
(How Death took her by surprise
Helpless in her great despair)
Smoothing back her yellow hair,
He kiss'd her icy brows; unwound
His rough arms, and she fell to the ground.

'The woman was fairer than she was wise:
But the serpent was wiser than she was fair:
For the serpent was lord in Paradise
Or ever the woman came there.
But when Eden-gates were barr'd amain,
And the fiery sword on guard in the East,
The lion arose from a long repose,
And quoth he, as he shook out his royal mane,

Now I am the strongest beast.'
Had the woman been wiser when she was queen
The lion had never been king, I ween.
But ever since storms began to lower
Beauty on earth hath been second to Power."
And this is the song that the Minstrel sung,
With the silver hair and the golden tongue,
Who sung by night in the grim Earl's hall.
And they held him in reverence one and all.

And so she died — the pale-faced girl.
And, for nine days after that, the Earl
Fumed and fret, and raved and swore,
Pacing up and down the chamber-floor,
And tearing his black beard as he went
In the fit of his sullen discontent.
And the Seneschal said it was fearful to hear him;
And not even the weather-worn Warden went near him;
And the shock-headed Pages huddled anear,
And bit their white lips till they bled, for fear.

But at last he bade them lift her lightly,
And bury her by the gray sea-shore,
Where the winds that blew from her own land nightly
Might wail round her grave thro' the wild rocks hoar.
So they lifted her lightly at dead of night,
And bore her down by the long torch-light —
Lank-hair'd faces, sallow and keen,
That burn'd out of the glassy pools between
The splashing sands which, as they plunged thro',
The coffin-lead weigh'd them down into;
And their feet, as they pluck'd them up, left pits
Which the water ooz'd into and out of by fits —
— And so to the deep-mouth'd bay's black brim,
Where the pale priests, all white-stoled and dim,
Held the cross and chanted the hymn,

That her soul might have peace when her bones
were dust,
And her name be written among the Just.
The Warden walked after the Seneschal grim;
And the shock-headed Pages walk'd after him:
And with mattock and spade a grave was made,
Where they carved the cross, and they wrote her
name,
And, returning each by the way that he came,
They left her under the bare black thorn.

The salt sea-wind sang shrill in the head of it;
And the bitter night grew chill with the dread of
it;
When the great round moon rose up forlorn
From the reefs, and whiten'd towards the morn.
For the forkéd tree, as the bleak blast took it,
Howl'd thro' it, and beat it, and bit it, and shook it
Like a living thing bewitch'd and bedevil'd,
Visibly shrunk, and shudder'd and shrivel'd.

And again the swallow, that false new-comer,
Flutter'd over the sea in the front of the summer,
A careless singer, as he should be
That only skimmeth the mighty sea;
Dipp'd his wings as he came and went,
And chirrup'd and twitter'd for heart's content,
And built on the new-made grave. But when
The Summer was over he flew back again.

And the Earl, as years went by, and his life
Grew listless, took him another wife:
And the Seneschal grim, and the Warden gray
Walk'd about in their wonted way:
And the lean-jaw'd shock-hair'd Pages too
Sung and swill'd as they used to do.
And the grooms, and the squires gamed and swore
And quarrel'd again as they quarrel'd before;
And the flowers decay'd in their dismal beds,

And dropp'd off from their lean shanks one by one,
Till nothing was left but the stalks and the heads,
Clump'd into heaps, or ripp'd into shreds,
To steam into salt in the sickly sun.

And the cattle low'd late up the glimmering plain,
Or dipp'd knee-deep, and splash'd themselves
In the pools spat out by the spiteful main,
Wallowing in sandy dykes and delves:
And the blear-eyed filmy sea did boom
With his old mysterious hungering sound:
And the wet wind wail'd in the chinks of the tomb,
Till the weeds in the surf were drench'd and
drown'd.
But once a stranger came over the wave,
And paused by the pale-faced Lady's grave.

It was when, just about to set,
A sadness held the sinking sun.
The moon delayed to shine as yet:
The Ave-Mary chime was done:
And from the bell-tower lean'd the ringers;
And in the chancel paused the singers,
With lingering looks, and claspéd fingers:
And the day reluctantly turn'd to his rest,
Like some untold life, that leaves exprest
But the half of its hungering love ere it close:
So he went sadly toward his repose
Deep in the heart of the slumbrous waves
Kindled far off in the desolate West.
And the breeze sprang up in the cool sea-caves
The castle stood with its courts in shade,
And all its toothéd towers imprest
On the sorrowful light that sunset made —
Such a light as sleeps shut up in the breast
Of some pining crimson-hearted rose,
Which, as you gaze at it, grows and grows
And all the warm leaves overflows;
Leaving its sweet source still to be guest.

The crumpled shadow of the thorn
Crawl'd over the sand-heaps raggedly,
And over the gray stone cross forlorn,
And on to that one man musing there
Moveless, while o'er him the night crept on,
And the hot yellow stars, slowly, one after one,
Mounted into the dark blue air
And brightened, and brightened. Then suddenly,
And sadly and silently,
Down the dim breezy brink of the sea sank the sun.

Ere the moon was abroad, the owl
Made himself heard in the echoing tower
Three times, four times. The bat with his cowl
Came and went round the lonely Bower
Where dwelt of yore the Earl's lost Lady.
There night after night, for years, in vain
The lingering moon had look'd through the pane,
And miss'd the face she used to find there,
White and wan like some mountain flower
In its rocky nook, as it paled and pined there
Only known to the moon and the wind there.
Lights flitted faint in the halls down lower
From lattice to lattice, and then glow'd steady.

The dipping gull: and the long gray pool:
And the reed that shows which way the breeze
blows cool,
From the wide warm sea to the low black land:
And the wave makes no sound on the soft yellow
sand:
But the inland shallows sharp and small
Are swarm'd about with the sultry midge.
And the land is still, and the ocean still:
And the weeds in the rifted rocks at will
Move on the tide, and float or glide.
And into the silent western side
Of the heaven the moon begins to fall.
But is it the fall of a plover's call

That is answer'd warily, low yet shrill,
From the sand-heapt mound and the rocky ridge?
And now o'er the dark plain so wild and wide
Falls the note of a horn from the old draw-bridge.

Who is it that waits at the castle-gates?
Call in the minstrel, and fill the bowl.
Bid him loose the great music and let the song roll.
Fill the bowl.
And first, as was due, to the Earl he bow'd:
Next to all the Sea-chieftains, blithe friends of the Earl's:
Then advanced thro' the praise of the murmuring crowd,
And sat down, as they bade him, and all his black curls
Bow'd over his harp, as in doubt which to choose
From the melodies coil'd at his heart. For a man
O'er some Beauty asleep for one moment might muse,
Half in love, ere he woke her. So ere he began,
He paused over his song. And they brought him, the Squires,
A heavy gold cup with the red wine ripe in it,
Then wave over wave of the sweet silver wires
'Gan ripple, and the minstrel took heart to begin it.

A harper that harps thorough mountain and glen,
Wandering, wandering the wide world over,
Sweetest of singers, yet saddest of men,
His soul's lost Lady in vain to discover.
Most fair, and most frail of the daughters of men,
O blest, and O curst, the man that should love her
Who has not loved? and who has not lost?
Wherever he wander, the wide world over,
Singing by city, and castle, and plain,
Abiding never, forever a rover,
Each man that shall hear him will swear almost
In the minstrel's song that his heart can discover

The selfsame lady by whom it was crost,
For love is love the wide world over.

What shall he liken his love unto?
Have you seen some cloud the sun sets thro',
When the lingering night is close at hand?
Have you seen some rose lie on the snow?
Or a summer bird in a winter land?
Or a lily dying for dearth of dew?
Or a pearl sea-cast on a barren strand?
Some garden never sunshine warms
Nor any tend? some lonely tree
That stretches bleak its barren arms
Turn'd inland from the blighting sea?
Her cheek was pale: her face was fair:
Her heart, he sung, was weak and warm·
All golden was the sleepy hair
That floated round about her form,
And hid the sweetness breathing there.
Her eyes were wild, like stars that shine
Far off in summer nights divine:
But her smile — it was like the golden wine
Pour'd into the spirit, as into a cup,
With passion brimming it up, and up,
And marvellous fancies fair and fine.
He took her hair to make sweet strings:
He hid her smile deep in his song.
This makes so rich the tune he sings
That o'er the world 'twill linger long.

There is a land far, far away from yours.
And there the stars are thrice as bright as these.
And there the nightingale strange music pours
All day out of the hearts of myrtle trees.
There the voice of the cuckoo sounds never forlorn
As you hear it far off thro' the deep purple valleys.
And the firefly dances by night in the corn.
And the little round owls in the long cypress alleys
Whoop for joy when the moon is born.

There ripen the olive and the tulip tree,
And in the sun broadens the green prickly pear.
And the bright galingales in the grass you may see.
And the vine, with her royal blue globes, dwelleth there,
Climbing and hanging deliciously
By every doorway and lone latticed chamber,
Where the damselfly flits, and the heavy brown bee
Hums alone, and the quick lizards rustle and clamber.
And all things, there, live and rejoice together,
From the frail peach-blossom that first appears
When birds are about in the blue summer weather,
To the oak that has lived through his eight hundred years.
And the castles are built on the hills, not the plains.
(And the wild windflowers burn about in the courts there)
They are white and undrench'd by the gray winter rains.
And the swallows, and all things, are blithe at their sports there.
O for one moment, at sunset, to stand
Far, far away, in that dear distant land
Whence they bore her — the loveliest lady that ever
Crost the bleak ocean. Oh nevermore, never,
Shall she stand with her feet in the warm dry grasses
Where the faint balm-heaving breeze heavily passes
And the white lotus-flower leans lone on the river

Rare were the gems which she had for her dower.
But all the wild flowers she left behind her.
— A broken heart and a rose-roof'd bower.
O oft, and in many a desolate hour,
The cold strange faces she sees shall remind her
Of hearts that were warmer, and smiles that were kinder,

Lost, like the roses they pluck'd from her bower!
Lonely and far from her own land they laid her!
— A swallow flew over the sea to find her.
Ah cold, cold and narrow, the bed that they made her!
The swallow went forth with the summer to find her.
The summer and the swallow came back o'er the sea,
And strange were the tidings the bird brought to me.

And the minstrel sung, and they prais'd and listen'd —
Gazed and prais'd while the minstrel sung.
Flusht was each cheek, and each fixt eye glistened,
And husht was each voice to the minstrel's tongue.
But the Earl grew paler more and more
As the song of the Singer grew louder and clearer,
And so dumb was the hall, you might hear the roar
Of the sea in its pauses grow nearer and drearer.
And . . . hush! hush! hush!
O was it the wind? or was it the rush
Of the restless waters that tumble and splash
On the wild sea-rocks? or was it the crash
Of stones on the old wet bridge up there?
Or the sound of the tempest come over the main?
— Nay, but just now the night was fair.
Was it the march of the midnight rain
Clattering down in the courts? or the crash
Of armour yonder? . . . Listen again!

Can it be lightning? — can it be thunder?
For a light is all round the lurid hall
That reddens and reddens the windows all,
And far away you may hear the fall
As of rafter and boulder splitting asunder.
It is not the thunder, and it is not the lightning
To which the castle is sounding and brightening,

But something worse than lightning or thunder;
For what is this that is coming yonder?

Which way? Here! Where?
Call the men! . . . Is it there?
Call them out! Ring the bell!
Ring the Fiend back to Hell!
Ring, ring the alarum for mercy! . . . Too late!
It has crawl'd up the walls — it has burst in the gate —
It looks thro' the windows — it creeps near the hall —
Near, more near — red and clear —
It is here!
Now the saints save us all!

And little, in truth boots it ringing the bell.
For the fire is loose on its way one may tell
By the hot simmering whispers and humming up there
In the oak-beams and rafters. Now one of the Squires
His elbow hath thrust thro' the half-smoulder'd door —
Such a hole as some rat for his brown wife might bore —
And straightway in snaky, white, wavering spires
The thin smoke twirls thro', and spreads eddying in gyres
Here and there toucht with vanishing tints from the glare
That has swathed in its rose-light the sharp turret stair.
Soon the door ruin'd thro': and in tumbled a cloud
Of black vapour. And first 'twas all blackness, and then
The quick forkéd fires leapt out from their shroud
In the blackness: and thro' it rush'd in the arm'd men

From the courtyard. And then there was flying
and fighting,
And praying and cursing — confusion confounded.
Each man, at wild hazard, thro' smoke ramparts
smiting,
Has struck . . . is it friend? is it foe? Who is
wounded?

But the Earl — who last saw him? Who cares? who knows?
Some one, no doubt, by the weight of his blows.
And they all, at times, heard his oath — so they
swore: —
Such a cry as some spear'd wild beast might give
vent to,
When the lean dogs are on him, and forth with
that roar
Of desolate wrath, the life is sent too.
If he die, he will die with the dying about him,
And his red wet sword in his hand, never doubt
him:
If he live, perchance he will bear his new bride
Thro' them all, past the bridge, to the wild sea-
side.
And there, whether he leave, or keep his wife
still,
There's the free sea round him, new lands, and
new life still.
And . . . but ah, the red light there! And high
up and higher
The soft, warm, vivid sparkles crowd kindling,
and wander
Far away down the breathless blue cone of the
night.
Saints! can it be that the ships are on fire,
Those fierce hot clots of crimson light,
Brightening, whitening in the distance yonder?
Slowly over the slumbrous dark
Up from those fountains of fire spark on spark

(You might count them almost) floats silent: and clear
In the steadfast glow the great cross beams,
And the sharp and delicate masts show black;
While wider and higher the red light streams,
And oozes, and overflows at the back.
Then faint thro' the distance a sound you hear,
And the bare poles totter and disappear.

Of the Earl, in truth, the Seneschal swore
(And over the ocean this tale he bore)
That when, as he fled on that last wild night,
He had gain'd the other side of the moat,
Dripping, he shook off his wet leathern coat,
And turning round beheld, from basement
To cope, the castle swathed in light,
And, reveal'd in the glare thro' My Lady's casement,
He saw, or dream'd he saw, this sight—

Two forms (and one for the Earl's he knew,
By the long shaggy beard and the broad back too)
Struggling, grappling, like things half human.
The other, he said, he but vaguely distinguish'd,
When a sound like the shriek of an agonized woman
Made him shudder, and lo, all the vision was gone!
Ceiling and floor had fallen thro',
In a glut of vomited flame extinguish'd;
And the still fire rose and broaden'd on.

How fearful a thing is fire!
You might make up your mind to die by water
A slow cool death — nay, at times, when weary
Of pains that pass not, and pleasures that pall,
When the temples throb, and the heart is dreary
And life is dried up, you could even desire

Thro' the flat green weeds to fall and fall
Half-asleep down the green light under them all,
As in a dream, while all things seem
Wavering, wavering, to feel the stream
Wind, and gurgle, and sound and gleam.
And who would very much fear to expire
By steel, in the front of victorious slaughter,
The blithe battle about him, and comrades in call?
But to die by fire——
O that night in the hall!

And the castle burn'd from base to top.
You had thought that the fire would never stop,
For it roar'd like the great north wind in the pines,
And shone as the boreal meteor shines
Watch'd by wild hunters in shuddering bands,
When wolves are about in the icy lands.
From the sea you might mark for a space of three days,
Or fainter, or fiercer, the dull red blaze.
And when this ceased, the smoke above it
Hung so heavy not even the wind seem'd to move it;
So it glared and groan'd, and night after night
Smoulder'd — a terrible beacon-light.

Now the Earl's old minstrel — he that had sung
His youth out in those halls — the man beloved,
With the silver hair and the golden tongue,
They bore him out from the fire; but he roved
Back to the stifled courts; and there
They watch'd him hovering, day after day,
To and fro, with his long white hair
And his gold harp, chanting a lonely lay;
Chanting and changing it o'er and o'er,
Like the mournful mad melodious breath
Of some wild swan singing himself to death,

As he floats down a strange land leagues away.
One day the song ceased. They heard it no more

Did you ever an Alpine eagle see
Come down from flying near the sun
To find his eyrie all undone
On lonely cliffs where chance hath led
Some spying thief the brood to plunder?
How hangs he desolate overhead,
And circling now aloft, now under,
His ruin'd home screams round and round,
Then drops flat fluttering to the ground.
So moaning round the roofs they saw him,
With his gleaming harp and his vesture white:
Going, and coming, and ever returning
To those chambers, emptied of beauty and state
And chok'd with blackness and ruin and burning
Then, as some instinct seem'd to draw him,
Like hidden hands, down to his fate,
He paused, plunged, dropp'd forever from sight
And a cone of smoke and sparkles roll'd up,
As out of some troubled crater-cup.

As for the rest, some died; some fled
Over the sea, nor ever return'd.
But until to the living return the dead
And they each shall stand and take their station
Again at the last great conflagration,
Never more will be seen the Earl or the stranger.
No doubt there is much here that's fit to be
burn'd.
Christ save us all in that day from the danger!

And this is why these fishermen say,
Sitting alone in their boats on the bay,
When the moon is low in the wild windy nights,
They hear strange sounds, and see strange sights
Spectres gathering all forlorn
Under the boughs of this bare black thorn.

A SOUL'S LOSS.

"If Beauty have a soul this is not she." —
TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

'Twixt the Future and the Past
There's a moment. It is o'er.
Kiss sad hands! we part at last.
I am on the other shore.
Fly stern Hour! and hasten fast.
Nobler things are gone before.

From the dark of dying years
Grows a face with violet eyes,
Tremulous thro' tender tears —
Warm lips heavy with rich sighs —
Ah, they fade! it disappears,
And with it my whole heart dies!

Dies . . . . and this chok'd world is sickening
Truth has nowhere room for breath.
Crusts of falsehood, slowly thickening
From the rottenness beneath
These rank social forms, are quickening
To a loathsome life-in-death.

O those devil's-marketplaces!
Knowing, nightly, she was there,
Can I marvel that the traces
On her spirit are not fair?
I forgot that air debases
When I knew she breath'd such air.

This a fair immortal spirit
For which God prepared his spheres?
What! shall this the stars inherit?
And the worth of honest tears?
A fool's fancy all its merit!
A fool's judgment all its fears!

No, she loves no other! No,
That is lost which she gave me.
Is this comfort — that I know
All her spirit's poverty?
When that dry soul is drain'd low,
His who wills the dregs may be!

Peace! I trust a heart forlorn
Weakly upon boisterous speech.
Pity were more fit than scorn.
Finger'd moth, and bloomless peach!
Gather'd rose without a thorn,
Set to fleer in all men's reach!

I am cloth'd with her disgrace.
O her shame is made my own!
O I reel from my high place!
All belief is overthrown.
What! This whirligig of lace,
This the Queen that I have known?

Starry Queen that did confer
Beauty on the barren earth!
Woodlands, wander'd oft with her
In her sadness and her mirth,
Feeling her ripe influence stir
Brought the violets to birth.

The great golden clouds of even,
They, too, knew her, and the host
Of the eternal stars in heaven;
And I deem'd I knew her most.
I, to whom the Word was given
How archangels have been lost!

Given in vain! . . . But all is over!
Every spell that bound me broken!
In her eyes I can discover
Of that perisht soul no token.

I can neither hate nor love her.
All my loss must be unspoken.

Mourn I may, that from her features
All the angel light is gone.
But I chide not. Human creatures
Are not angels. She was none.
Women have so many natures!
I think she loved me well with one.

All is not with love departed.
Life remains, tho' toucht with scorn.
Lonely, but not broken-hearted.
Nature changes not. The morn
Breathes not sadder. Buds have started
To white clusters on the thorn.

And to-morrow I shall see
How the leaves their green silk sheath
Have burst upon the chestnut-tree.
And the white rose-bush beneath
My lattice which, once tending, she
Made thrice sweeter with her breath,

Its black buds thro' moss and glue
Will swell greener. And at eve
Winking bats will waver thro'
The gray warmth from eave to eave,
While the daisy gathers dew.
These things grieve not, tho' I grieve.

What of that? Deep Nature's gladness
Does not help this grief to less.
And the stars will show no sadness,
And the flowers no heaviness,
Tho' each thought should turn to madness
'Neath the strain of its distress!

No, if life seem lone to me,
'Tis scarce lonelier than at first.

Lonely natures there must be.
  Eagles are so. I was nurst
Far from love in infancy:
  I have sought to slake my thirst

At high founts; to fly alone,
  Haunt the heaven, and soar, and sing.
Earth's warm joys I have not known.
  This one heart held everything.
Now my eirie is o'erthrown!
  As of old, I spread the wing,

And rise up to meet my fate
  With a yet unbroken will.
When Heaven shut up Eden-gate
  Man was given the earth to till.
There's a world to cultivate,
  And a solitude to fill.

Welcome man's old helpmate, Toil!
  How may this heart's hurt be heal'd?
Crush the olive into oil;
  Turn the ploughshare; sow the field.
All are tillers of the soil.
  Each some harvest hopes to yield.

Shall I perish with the whole
  Of the coming years in view
Unattempted? To the soul
  Every hour brings something new.
Still suns rise: still ages roll.
  Still some deed is left to do.

Some . . . but what? Small matter now
  For one lily for her hair,
For one rose to wreathe her brow,
  For one gem to sparkle there,
I had . . . words, old words, I know!
  What was I, that she should care

How I differ'd from the common
Crowd that thrills not to her touch?
How I deem'd her more than human,
And had died to crown her such?
They? To them she is mere woman.
Oh, her loss and mine is much!

Fool, she haunts me still! No wonder!
Not a bud on yon black bed,
Not a swatéd lily yonder,
But recalls some fragrance fled!
Here, what marvel I should ponder
On the last word which she said?

I must seek some other place
Where free Nature knows her not:
Where I shall not meet her face
In each old familiar spot.
There is comfort left in space.
Even this grief may be forgot.

Great men reach dead hands unto me
From the graves to comfort me.
Shakespeare's heart is throbbing thro' me
All man has been man may be.
Plato speaks like one that knew me.
Life is made Philosophy.

Ah, no, no! while yet the leaf
Turns, the truth upon its pall.
By the stature of this grief,
Even Shakespeare shows so small!
Plato palters with relief.
Grief is greater than them all!

They were pedants who could speak.
Grander souls have past unheard:
Such as found all language weak;
Choosing rather to record

Secrets before Heaven: nor break
Faith with angels by a word.

And Heaven heeds this wretchedness
Which I suffer. Let it be.
Would that I could love thee less!
I, too, am dragg'd down by thee.
Thine — in weakness — thine — ah yes!
Yet farewell eternally.

Child, I have no lips to chide thee.
Take the blessing of a heart
(Never more to beat beside thee!)
Which in blessing breaks. Depart.
Farewell! I that deified thee
Dare not question what thou art.

THE ARTIST.

O Artist, range not over-wide:
Lest what thou seek be haply hid
In bramble-blossoms at thy side,
Or shut within the daisy-lid.

God's glory lies not out of reach.
The moss we crush beneath our feet,
The pebbles on the wet sea-beach,
Have solemn meanings strange and sweet.

The peasant at his cottage door
May teach thee more than Plato knew:
See that thou scorn him not: adore
God in him, and thy nature too.

Know well thy friends. The woodbine's breath,
The woolly tendril on the vine,
Are more to thee than Cato's death,
Or Cicero's words to Catiline

The wild rose is thy next in blood:
Share Nature with her, and thy heart.
The kingcups are thy sisterhood:
Consult them duly on thine art.

Nor cross the sea for gems. Nor seek:
Be sought. Fear not to dwell alone.
Possess thyself. Be proudly-meek.
See thou be worthy to be known.

The Genius on thy daily ways
Shall meet, and take thee by the hand:
But serve him not as who obeys:
He is thy slave if thou command:

And blossoms on the blackberry-stalks
He shall enchant as thou dost pass,
Till they drop gold upon thy walks,
And diamonds in the dewy grass.

Such largess of the liberal bowers
From left to right is grandly flung,
What time their subject blooms and flowers
King-Poets walk in state among.

Be quiet. Take things as they come:
Each hour will draw out some surprise.
With blessing let the days go home:
Thou shalt have thanks from evening skies.

Lean not on one mind constantly:
Lest, where one stood before, two fall.
Something God hath to say to thee
Worth hearing from the lips of all.

All things are thine estate: yet must
Thou first display the title-deeds,
And sue the world. Be strong: and trust
High instincts more than all the creeds.

The world of Thought is pack'd so tight,
If thou stand up another tumbles:
Heed it not, tho' thou have to fight
With giants: whoso follows stumbles.

Assert thyself: and by-and-by
The world will come and lean on thee.
But seek not praise of men: thereby
Shall false shows cheat thee. Boldly be.

Each man was worthy at the first:
God spake to us ere we were born:
But we forget. The land is curst:
We plant the brier, reap the thorn.

Remember, every man He made
Is different: has some deed to do,
Some work to work. Be undismay'd,
Tho' thine be humble: do it too.

Not all the wisdom of the schools
Is wise for thee. Hast thou to speak?
No man hath spoken for thee. Rules
Are well: but never fear to break

The scaffolding of other souls:
It was not meant for thee to mount;
Tho' it may serve thee. Separate wholes
Make up the sum of God's account.

Earth's number-scale is near us set;
The total God alone can see;
But each some fraction: shall I fret
If you see Four where I saw Three?

A unit's loss the sum would mar;
Therefore if I have One or Two,
I am as rich as others are,
And help the whole as well as you.

This wild white rose-bud in my hand
Hath meanings meant for me alone,
Which no one else can understand:
To you it breathes with alter'd tone

How shall I class its properties
For you? or its wise whisperings
Interpret? Other ears and eyes
It teaches many other things

We number daisies, fringe and star:
We count the cinqfoils and the poppie
We know not what they mean. We are
Degenerate copyists of copies.

We go to Nature, not as lords,
But servants: and she treats us thus:
Speaks to us with indifferent words,
And from a distance looks at us.

Let us go boldly, as we ought,
And say to her "We are a part
Of that supreme original Thought
Which did conceive thee what thou art

"We will not have this lofty look:
Thou shalt fall down, and recognize
Thy kings: we will write in thy book,
Command thee with our eyes."

She hath usurpt us. She should be
Our model: but we have become
Her miniature-painters. So when we
Entreat her softly she is dumb.

Nor serve the subject overmuch:
Nor rhythm and rhyme, nor colour and form
Know Truth hath all great graces, such
As shall with these thy work inform.

We ransack History's tatter'd page:
  We prate of epoch and costume:
Call this, and that, the Classic Age:
  Choose tunic now, now helm and plume:

But while we halt in weak debate
  'Twixt that and this appropriate theme,
The offended wild-flowers stare and wait,
  The bird hoots at us from the stream.

Next, as to laws. What's beautiful
  We recognize in form and face:
And judge it thus, and thus, by rule,
  As perfect law brings perfect grace:

If thro' the effect we drag the cause,
  Dissect, divide, anatomize,
Results are lost in loathsome laws,
  And all the ancient beauty dies:

Till we, instead of bloom and light,
  See only sinews, nerves, and veins:
Nor will the effect and cause unite,
  For one is lost if one remains.

But from some higher point behold
  This dense, perplexing, complication.
And laws involved in laws unfold,
  And orb into thy contemplation.

God, when he made the seed, conceived
  The flower; and all the work of sun
And rain, before the stem was leaved,
  In that prenatal thought was done:

The girl who twines in her soft hair
  The orange-flower, with love's devotion,
By the mere act of being fair
  Sets countless laws of life in motion.

So thou, by one thought thoroughly great,
Shalt, without heed thereto, fulfil
All laws of art. Create! create!
Dissection leaves the dead dead still.

All Sciences are branches, each,
Of that first science — Wisdom. Seize
The true point whence, if thou shouldst reach
Thine arm out, thou may'st grasp all these,

And close all knowledge in thy palm.
As History proves Philosophy:
Philosophy, with warnings calm,
Prophet-like, guiding History.

Burn catalogues. Write thine own books.
What need to pore o'er Greece and Rome?
When whoso thro' his own life looks
Shall find that he is fully come

Thro' Greece and Rome, and Middle-Age:
Hath been by turns, ere yet full-grown,
Soldier, and Senator, and Sage,
And worn the tunic and the gown.

Cut the world thoroughly to the heart.
The sweet and bitter kernel crack.
Have no half-dealings with thine art.
All heaven is waiting: turn not back.

If all the world for thee and me
One solitary shape possess'd,
What shall I say? a single tree —
Whereby to type and hint the rest,

And I could imitate the bark
And foliage, both in form and hue,
Or silvery-gray, or brown and dark,
Or rough with moss, or wet with dew,

But thou, with one form in thine eye,
  Couldst penetrate all forms: possess
The soul of form: and multiply
  A million like it, more or less,

Which were the Artist of us twain?
  The moral's clear to understand.
Where'er we walk, by hill or plain,
  Is there no mystery on the land?

The osier'd, oosy water, ruffled
  By fluttering swifts that dip and wink:
Deep cattle in the cowslips muffled,
  Or lazy-eyed upon the brink:

Or, when — a scroll of stars — the night
  (By God withdrawn), is roll'd away,
The silent sun, on some cold height,
  Breaking the great seal of the day:

Are these not words more rich than ours?
  O seize their import if you can!
Our souls are parch'd like withering flowers
  Our knowledge ends where it began.

While yet about us fall God's dews,
  And whisper secrets o'er the earth
Worth all the weary years we lose
  In learning legends of our birth,

Arise, O Artist! and restore
  Their music to the moaning winds,
Love's broken pearls to life's bare shore,
  And freshness to our fainting minds

THE WIFE'S TRAGEDY.

I.

THE EVENING BEFORE THE FLIGHT.

TAKE the diamonds from my hair!
Take the flowers from the urn!
Fling the lattice wide! more air!
Air — more air, or else I burn!

Put the bracelets by. And thrust
Out of sight these hated pearls.
I could trample them to dust,
Tho' they *were* his gift, the Earl's!

Flusht I am? The dance it was.
Only that. Now leave me, Sweet.
Take the flowers, Love, because
They will wither in this heat.

Good night, dearest! Leave the door
Half-way open as you go.
— Oh, thank God! . . . Alone once more.
Am I dreaming? . . . Dreaming? . . . no!

Still that music underneath
Works to madness in my brain.
Even the roses seem to breathe
Poison'd perfumes, full of pain.

Let me think . . . my head is aching.
I have little strength to think.
And I know my heart is breaking.
Yet, O love, I will not shrink!

In his look was such sweet sadness.
And he fix'd that look on me.
I was helpless . . . call it madness,
Call it guilt . . . but it must be.

I can bear it, if, in losing
All things else, I lose him not.
All the grief is my own choosing.
Can I murmur at my lot?

Ah, the night is bright and still
Over all the fields I know.
And the chestnuts on the hill:
And the quiet lake below.

By that lake I yet remember
How, last year, we stood together
One wild eve in warm September
Bright with thunder: not a feather

Stirr'd the slumbrous swans that floated
Past the reed-beds, husht and white:
Towers of sultry cloud hung moated
In the lake's unshaken light:

Far behind us all the extensive
Woodland blacken'd against heaven:
And we spoke not: — pausing pensive:
Till the thunder-cloud was riven,

And the black wood whiten'd under,
And the storm began to roll,
And the love laid up like thunder
Burst at once upon my soul.

There! . . . the moon is just in crescent
In the silent happy sky.
And to-night the meanest peasant
In her light's more blest than I.

Other moons I soon shall see
Over Asian headlands green:
Ocean-spaces sparkling free
Isles of breathless balm between·

And the rosy-rising star
  At the setting of the day
From the distant sandy bar
  Shining over Africa:

Steering thro' the glowing weather
  Past the tracts of crimson light,
Down the sunset lost together
  Far athwart the summer night.

"Canst thou make such life thy choice
  My heart's own, my chosen one?"
So he whisper'd and his voice
  Had such magic in its tone!

But one hour ago we parted.
  And we meet again to-morrow.
Parted — silent, and sad-hearted:
  And we meet — in guilt and sorrow

But we *shall* meet . . . meet, O God,
  To part never . . . the last time!
Yes! the Ordeal shall be trod.
  Burning ploughshares — love and crime

O with him, with him to wander
  Thro' the wide world — only his!
Heart and hope and heaven to squander
  On the wild wealth of his kiss!

Then? . . . like these poor flowers that wither
  In my bosom, to be thrown
Lightly from him any whither
  When the sweetness all is flown?

Oh I know it all, my fate!
  But the gulf is crost forever.
And regret is born too late.
  The shut Past reopens never

Fear? . . . I cannot fear! for fear
  Dies with hope in every breast,
Oh I see the frozen sneer,
  Careless smile, and callous jest!

But my shame shall yet be worn
  Like the purple of a Queen.
I can answer scorn with scorn.
  Fool! I know not what I mean.

Yet beneath his smile (*his* smile!)
  Smiles less kind I shall not see.
Let the whole wide world revile.
  He is all the world to me.

So to-night all hopes, all fears,
  All the bright and brief array
Of my lost youth's happier years,
  With these gems I put away.

Gone! . . . so . . . one by one . . . all gone!
  Not one jewel I retain
Of my life's wealth. All alone
  I tread boldly o'er my pain

On to him . . . Ah, me! my child—
  My own fair-hair'd, darling boy!
In his sleep just now he smiled.
  All his dreams are dreams of joy.

How those soft long lashes shade
  That young cheek so husht and warm
Like a half-blown rosebud laid
  On the little dimpled arm!

He will wake without a mother.
  He will hate me when he hears
From the cold lips of another
  All my faults in after years.

None will tell the deep devotion
Wherewith I have brooded o'er
His young life, since its first motion
Made me hope and pray once more.

On my breast he smiled and slept,
Smiled between my wrongs and me,
Till the weak warm tears I wept
Set my dry, coil'd nature free.

Nay, . . . my feverish kiss would wake him.
How can I dare bless his sleep?
They will change him soon, and make him
Like themselves that never weep;

Fitted to the world's bad part:
Yet, will all their wealth afford him
Aught more rich than this lost heart
Whose last anguish yearns toward him?

Ah, there's none will love him then
As I love that leave him now!
He will mix with selfish men.
Yes, he has his father's brow!

Lie thou there, thou poor rose-blossom,
In that little hand more light
Than upon this restless bosom,
Whose last gift is given to-night.

God forgive me! — My God cherish
His lone motherless infancy!
Would to-night that I might perish!
But heaven will not let me die.

O love! love! but this is bitter!
O that we had never met!
O but hate than love were fitter!
And he too may hate me yet.

Yet to him have I not given
All life's sweetness? . . . fame? and name?
Hope? and happiness? and heaven?
Can he hate me for my shame?

"Child," he said, "thy life was glad
In the dawning of its years;
And love's morn should be less sad,
For his eve may close in tears.

"Sweet in novel lands," he said,
"Day by day to share delight;
On by soft surprises led,
And together rest at night.

"We will see the shores of Greece,
And the temples of the Nile:
Sail where summer suns increase
Toward the south from isle to isle.

"Track the first star that swims on
Glowing depths toward night and us,
While the heats of sunset crimson
All the purple Bosphorus.

"Leaning o'er some dark ship-side,
Watch the wane of mighty moons;
Or thro' starlit Venice glide,
Singing down the blue lagoons.

"So from coast to coast we'll range,
Growing nearer as we move
On our charm'd way; each soft change
Only deepening changeless love."

'Twas the dream which I, too, dream'd
Once, long since, in days of yore.
Life's long-faded fancies seem'd
At his words to bloom once more

The old hope, the wreckt belief,
The lost light of vanisht years,
Ere my heart was worn with grief,
Or my eyes were dimm'd with tears!

When a careless girl I clung
With proud trust to my own powers,
Ah, long since I, too, was young,
I, too, dream'd of happier hours!

Whether this may yet be so,
(Truth or dream) I cannot tell.
But where'er his footsteps go
Turns my heart, I feel too well.

Ha! the long night wears away.
Yon cold drowsy star grows dim.
The long fear'd, long wisht-for, day
Comes, when I shall fly with him.

In the laurel wakes the thrush.
Thro' these dreaming chambers wide
Not a sound is stirring. Hush;
– Oh, it was my child that cried!

II.

THE PORTRAIT.

Yes, 'tis she! Those eyes! that hair
With the selfsame wondrous hue!
And that smile — which was so fair,
Is it strange I deemed it true?

Years, years, years I have not drawn
Back this curtain! there she stands
By the terrace on the lawn,
With the white rose in her hands:

And about her the armorial
  Scutcheons of a haughty race,
Graven each with its memorial
  Of the old Lords of the Place.

You, who do profess to see
  In the face the written mind,
Look in that face, and tell me
  In what part of it you find

All the falsehood, and the wrong,
  And the sin, which must have been
Hid in baleful beauty long,
  Like the worm that lurks unseen

In the shut heart of the flower.
  'Tis the Sex, no doubt! And still
Some may lack the means, the power,
  There's not one that lacks the will.

Their own way they seek the Devil,
  Ever prone to the deceiver!
If too deep I feel this evil
  And this shame, may God forgive her!

For I loved her, — loved, ay, loved her
  As a man just once may love.
I so trusted, so approved her,
  Set her, blindly, so above

This poor world which was about her;
  And (so loving her) because,
With a faith too high to doubt her,
  I, forsooth, but seldom was

At her feet with clamorous praises
  And protested tenderness
(These things some men can do) phrases
  On her face, perhaps her dress,

Or the flower she chose to braid
In her hair — because, you see,
Thinking love's best proved unsaid,
And by words the dignity

Of true feeling's often lost,
I was vow'd to life's broad duty;
Man's great business uppermost
In my mind, not woman's beauty;

Toiling still to win for her
Honour, fortune, state in life
(" Too much with the Minister,
And too little with the wife!")

Just for this, she flung aside
All my toil, my heart, my name;
Trampled on my ancient pride,
Turned my honour into shame.

Oh, if this old coronet
Weigh'd too hard on her young brow,
Need she thus dishonour it,
Fling it in the dust so low?

But 'tis just these women's way —
All the same the wide world over!
Fool'd by what's most worthless, they
Cheat in turn the honest lover.

And I was not, I thank heaven,
Made, as some, to read them thro',
Were life three times longer even,
There are better things to do.

No! to let a woman lie
Like a canker, at the roots
Of a man's life, — burn it dry,
Nip the blossom, stunt the fruits,

This I count both shame and thrall!
Who is free to let one creature
Come between himself, and all
The true process of his nature,

While across the world the nations
Call to us that we should share
In their griefs, their exultations? —
All they will be, all they are!

And so much yet to be done —
Wrong to root out, good to strengthen!
Such hard battles to be won!
Such long glories yet to lengthen!

'Mid all these, how small one grief —
One wreck'd heart, whose hopes are o'er!
For myself I scorn relief.
For the people I claim more.

Strange! these crowds whose instincts guide them
Fail to get the thing they would,
Till we nobles stand beside them,
Give our names, or shed our blood.

From of old this hath been so.
For we too were with the first
In the fight fought long ago
When the chain of Charles was burst

Who but we set Freedom's border
Wrench'd at Runnymede from John?
Who but we stand, towers of order,
'Twixt the red cap and the Throne?

And they wrong us, England's Peers,
Us, the vanguard of the land,
Who should say the march of years
Makes us shrink at Truth's right hand.

'Mid the armies of Reform,
To the People's cause allied,
We — the forces of the storm!
We — the planets of the tide!

Do I seem too much to fret
At my own peculiar woe?
Would to heaven I could forget
How I loved her long ago!

As a father loves a child,
So I loved her: — rather thus
Than as youth loves, when our wild
New-found passions master us.

And — for I was proud of old
('Tis my nature) — doubtless she
In the man so calm, so cold,
All the heart's warmth could not see.

Nay, I blame myself — nor lightly.
Whose chief duty was to guide
Her young careless life more rightly
Thro' the perils at her side.

Ah, but love is blind! and I
Loved her blindly, blindly! . . . Well,
Who that ere loved trustfully
Such strange danger could foretell?

As some consecrated cup
On its saintly shrine secure,
All my life seem'd lifted up
On that heart I deem'd so pure.

Well, for me there yet remains
Labour — that's much: then, the state:
And, what pays a thousand pains,
Sense of right and scorn of fate.

And, oh, more! . . . my own brave boy,
With his frank and eager brow,
And his hearty innocent joy.
For as yet he does not know

All the wrong his mother did.
Would that this might pass unknown!
For his young years God forbid
I should darken by my own.

Yet this must come . . . But I mean
He shall be, as time moves on,
All his mother might have been,
Comfort, counsel — both in one.

Doubtless, first, in that which moved me
Man's strong natural wrath had part.
Wrong'd by one I deem'd had loved me,
For I loved her from my heart!

But that's past! If I was sore
To the heart, and blind with shame,
I see calmly now. Nay, more —
For I pity where I blame.

For, if he betray or grieve her,
What is hers to turn to still?
And at last, when he shall leave her,
As at last he surely will,

Where shall she find refuge? what
That worst widowhood can soothe?
For the Past consoles her not,
Nor the memories of her youth,

Neither that which in the dust
She hath flung — the name she bore,
But with her own shame she must
Dwell forsaken evermore.

Nothing left but years of anguish,
And remorse but not return:
Of her own self-hate to languish:
For her long-lost peace to yearn:

Or, yet worse beyond all measure,
Starting from wild reveries,
Drain the poison misnamed Pleasure,
And laugh drunken on the lees.

O false heart! O woman, woman,
Woman! would thy treachery
Had been less! For surely no man
Better loved than I loved thee.

We must never meet again.
Even shouldst thou repent the past.
Both must suffer: both feel pain:
Ere God pardon both at last.

Farewell, thou false face! Life speeds me
On its duties. I must fight:
I must toil. The People needs me:
And I speak for them to-night.

III.

THE LAST INTERVIEW.

THANKS, Dear! Put the lamp down .... so
For my eyes are weak and dim.
How the shadows come and go!
Speak truth — have they sent for him?

Yes? thank Heaven! And he will come,
Come and watch my dying hour —
Tho' I left and shamed his home.
— I am wither'd like this flower

Which he gave me long ago.
'Twas upon my bridal eve,
When I swore to love him so
As a wife should — smile or grieve

With him, for him — and not shrink.
And now? . . . . . O the long, long pain!
See this sunken cheek! You think
He would know my face again?

All its wretched beauty gone!
Only the deep care survives.
Ah, could years of grief atone
For those fatal hours! . . . . . It drives

Past the pain, the bitter blast!
In this garret one might freeze.
Hark there! wheels below! At last
He is come then? No . . . the trees

And the night-wind — nothing more!
Set the chair for him to sit,
When he comes. And close the door,
For the gust blows cold thro' it.

When I think, I can remember
I was born in castle halls —
How yon dull and dying ember
Glares against the whitewasht walls!

If he come not (but you said
That the messenger was sent
Long since?) Tell him when I'm dead
How my life's last hours were spent

In repenting that life's sin,
And . . . . . the room grows strangely dark!
See, the rain is oozing in.
Set the lamp down nearer. Hark,

Footsteps, footsteps on the stairs!
His . . . no, no! 'twas *not* the wind.
God, I know, has heard my prayers.
We shall meet. I am resign'd.

Prop me up upon the pillows.
Will he come to my bedside?
Once 'twas his . . . . Among the willows
How the water seems to glide!

Past the woods, the farms, the towers,
It seems gliding, gliding thro'.
" *Dearest see, these young June-flowers,*
I have pluckt them all for you,

Here, where pass'd my boyhood musing
On the bride which I might wed."
Ah, it goes now! I am losing
All things. What was that he said?

Say, where am I? . . . this strange room?

THE EARL.

Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Ah, his voice! I knew it.
But this place? . . . . Is this the tomb,
With the cold dews creeping thro' it?

THE EARL.

Gertrude! Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Will you stand
Near me? Sit down. Do not stir.
Tell me, may I take your hand?
Tell me, will you look on her

Who so wrong'd you? I have wept
O such tears for that sin's sake!
And that thought has never slept,—
But it lies here, like a snake,

In my bosom — gnawing, gnawing
All my life up! I had meant,
Could I live yet .... Death is drawing
Near me —

THE EARL.

God, thy punishment!

Dare I judge her? —

GERTRUDE.

O, believe me,
'Twas a dream, a hideous dream.
And I wake now. Do not leave me.
I am dying. All things seem

Failing from me — even my breath!
But my sentence is from old.
Sin came first upon me. Death
Follows sin, soon, soon! Behold,

Dying thus! Ah, why didst leave
Lonely Love's lost bridal bowers
Where I found the snake, like Eve,
Unsuspected 'mid the flowers?

Had I been some poor man's bride
I had shared with love his lot:
Labour'd truly by his side,
And made glad his lowly cot

I had been content to mate
Love with labour's sunburnt brows
But to be a thing of state —
Homeless in a husband's house!

In the gorgeous game — the strife
For the dazzling prize — that moved you,
Love seemed crowded out of life —

THE EARL.

Ah fool! and I loved you, loved you!

GERTRUDE.

Yes. I see it all at last —
All in ruins. I can dare
To gaze down o'er my lost past
From these heights of my despair.

Oh, when all seem'd grown most drear —
I was weak — I cannot tell —
But the serpent in my ear
Whisper'd, whisper'd — and I fell.

Look around, now. Does it cheer you
This strange place? the wasted frame
Of the dying woman near you,
Weigh'd into her grave by shame?

Can you trace in this wan form
Aught resembling that young girl's
Whom you loved once? See, this arm —
Shrunken, shrunken! And my curls,

They have cut them all away.
And my brows are worn with woe.
Would you, looking at me, say
She was lovely long ago?

Husband, answer! in all these
Are you not avenged? If I
Could rise now, upon my knees,
At your feet, before I die,

I would fall down in my sorrow
And my shame, and say "forgive,"
That which will be dust to-morrow,
This weak clay!

THE EARL.

Poor sufferer, live

God forgives. Shall I not so?

GERTRUDE.

Nay, a better life, in truth,
I do hope for. Not below.
Partner of my perisht youth,

Husband, wrong'd one! Let your blessing
Be with me, before, to-night,
From the life that's past redressing
This stray'd soul must take its flight!

Tears, warm tears! I feel them creep
Down my cheek. Tears—not my own.
It is long since I could weep.
Past all tears my grief hath grown.

Over this dry wither'd cheek,
Drop by drop, I feel them fall.
But my voice is growing weak:
And I have not spoken all.

I had much to say. My son,
My lost child that never knew me!
Is he like me? One by one,
All his little ways come to me.

Is he grown? I fancy him!
How that childish face comes back
O'er my memory sweet and dim!
And his long hair? Is it black?

Or as mine was once? His mother
Did he ever ask to see?
Has he grown to love another —
Some strange woman not like me?

Would he shudder to behold
This pale face and faded form
If he knew, in days of old,
How he slumber'd on my arm?

How I nurst him? loved him? miss'd him
All this long heartbroken time?
It is years since last I kiss'd him.
Does he hate me for my crime?

I had meant to send some token —
If, indeed, I dared to send it.
This old chain — the links are broken —
Like my life — I could not mend it

Husband, husband! I am dying,
Dying! Let me feel your kiss
On my brow where I am lying.
You are great enough for this!

And you'll lay me, when I'm gone,
— Not in those old sculptured walls!
Let no name be carved — no stone —
No ancestral funerals!

In some little grave of grass
Anywhere, you'll let me lie:
Where the nightwinds only pass,
Or the clouds go floating by;

Where my shame may be forgot;
And the story of my life
And my sin remember'd not.
So forget the faithless wife;

Or if, haply, when I'm dead,
On some worthier happier breast
Than mine was, you lean your head,
Should one thought of me molest

Those calm hours, recall me only
As you see me — worn with tears:
Dying desolate here; left lonely
By the overthrow of years.

May I lay my arm, then, there?
Does it not seem strange to you,
This old hand among your hair?
And these wasted fingers tōo?

How the lamp wanes! All grows dark —
Dark and strange. Yet now there shined
Something past me .... Husband, hark!
There are voices on the wind.

Are they come? and do they ask me
For the songs we used to sing?
Strange that memory thus should task me!
Listen —
Birds are on the wing:

And thy Birthday Morn is rising.
May it ever rise as bright!
Wake not yet! The day's devising
Fair new things for thy delight.

Wake not yet! Last night this flower
Near thy porch began to pout
From its warm sheath: in an hour
All the young leaves will be out.

Wake not yet! So dear thou art, love,
That I grudge these buds the bliss
Each will bring to thy young heart, love,
I would claim all for my kiss.

Wake not yet!
— There now, it fails me!
Is my lord there? I am ill.
And I cannot tell what ails me.
Husband! Is he near me still?

Oh, this anguish seems to crush
All my life up — body and mind!

THE EARL.

Gertrude! Gertrude! Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Hush!
There are voices in the wind.

THE EARL.

Still she wanders! Ah, the plucking
At the sheet!

GERTRUDE.

Hist! do not take it
From my bosom. See, 'tis sucking!
If it sleep we must not wake it.

Such a little rosy mouth!
— Not to-night, O not to-night!
Did he tell me in the South
That those stars were twice as bright?

Off! away! unhand me — go!
I forgive thee my lost heaven,
And the wrong which thou didst do.
Would my sin, too, were forgiven!

Gone at last! . . . Ah, fancy feigns
These wild visions! I grow weak.
Fast, fast dying! Life's warmth wanes
From me. Is the fire out?

THE EARL.

Speak,

Gertrude, speak! My wife, my wife!
Nay she is not dead, — not dead!
See, the lips move. There is life.
She is choking. Lift her head.

GERTRUDE.

* * * * * *

Death! . . . My eyes grow dim, and dimmer.
I can scarcely see thy face.
But the twilight seems to glimmer,
Lighted from some distant place.

Husband!

THE EARL.

Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Art thou near me?
On thy breast — once more — thy breast!
I have sinn'd — and — nay, yet hear me,
And repented — and —

THE EARL.

The rest

God hath heard, where now thou art,
Thou poor soul, — in Heaven.
The door —

Close it softly, and depart.
Leave us!
She is mine once more.

MINOR POEMS.

THE PARTING OF LAUNCELOT AND GUENEVERE.

A FRAGMENT.

NOW, as the time wore by to Our Lady's Day,
Spring linger'd in the chambers of the South.
The nightingales were far in fairy lands
Beyond the sunset: but the wet blue woods
Were half aware of violets in the wake
Of morning rains. The swallow still delay'd
To build and be about in noisy roofs,
And March was moaning in the windy elm.

But Arthur's royal purpose held to keep
A joust of arms to solemnize the time
In stately Camelot. So the King sent forth
His heralds, and let cry thro' all the land
That he himself would take the lists, and tilt
Against all comers.
Hither came the chiefs
Of Christendom. The King of Northgalies;
Anguishe, the King of Ireland; the Haut Prince,
Sir Galahault; the King o' the Hundred Knights;
The Kings of Scotland and of Britany;
And many more renownéd knights whereof

The names are glorious. Also all the earls,
And all the dukes, and all the mighty men
And famous heroes of the Table Round,
From far Northumberland to where the wave
Rides rough on Devon from the outer main.
So that there was not seen for seven years,
Since when, at Whitsuntide, Sir Galahad
Departed out of Carlyel from the court,
So fair a fellowship of goodly knights.

Then would King Arthur that the Queen should ride
With him from Carlyel to Camelot
To see the jousts. But she, because that yet
The sickness was upon her, answer'd nay.
Then said King Arthur, "This repenteth me.
For never hath been seen for seven years,
No, not since Galahad, at Whitsuntide,
Departed from us out of Carlyel,
So fair a fellowship of goodly knights."
But the Queen would not, and the King in wrath
Brake up the court, and rode to Astolat
On this side Camelot.
Now men said the Queen
Tarried behind because of Launcelot,
For Launcelot staid to heal him of his wound.
And there had been estrangement 'twixt these two
I' the later time, because of bitter words.
So when the King with all his fellowship
Was ridden out of Carlyel, the Queen
Arose, and call'd to her Sir Launcelot.

Then to Sir Launcelot spoke Queen Guenevere

"Not for the memory of that love whereof
No more than memory lives, but, Sir, for that
Which even when love is ended yet endures
Making immortal life with deathless deeds,

Honour — true knighthood's golden spurs, the crown
And priceless diadem of peerless Queens —
I make appeal to you, that hear perchance
The last appeal which I shall ever make.
So weigh my words not lightly! for I feel
The fluttering fires of life grow faint and cold
About my heart. And oft, indeed, to me
Lying whole hours awake in the dead nights
The end seems near, as tho' the darkness knew
The angel waiting there to call my soul
Perchance before the house awakes; and oft
When faint, and all at once, from far away,
The mournful midnight bells begin to sound
Across the river, all the days that were
(Brief, evil days!) return upon my heart,
And, where the sweetness seem'd, I see the sin.
For, waking lone, long hours before the dawn,
Beyond the borders of the dark I seem
To see the twilight of another world,
That grows and grows and glimmers on my gaze.
And oft, when late, before the languorous moon
Thro' yonder windows to the West goes down
Among the pines, deep peace upon me falls,
Deep peace like death, so that I think I know
The blesséd Mary and the righteous saints
Stand at the throne, and intercede for me.
Wherefore these things are thus I cannot tell.
But now I pray you of your feälty,
And by all knightly faith which may be left,
Arise and get you hence, and join the King.
For wherefore hold you thus behind the court,
Seeing my liege the King is moved in wrath?
For wete you well what say your foes and mine.
'See how Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenevere
Do hold them ever thus behind the King
That they may take their pleasure!' Knowing not

How that for me all these delights are come
To be as wither'd violets."
Half in tears
She ceased abrupt. Given up to a proud grief,
Vex'd to be vext. With love and anger moved.
Love toucht with scorn, and anger pierced with love.
About her, all unheeded, her long hair
Loos'd its warm, yellow, waving loveliness,
And o'er her bare and shining shoulder cold
Fell floating free. Upon one full white arm,
To which the amorous purple coverlet
Clung dimpling close, her drooping state was propt.
There, half in shadow of her soft gold curls,
She lean'd, and like a rose enricht with dew,
Whose heart is heavy with the clinging bee,
Bow'd down toward him all her glowing face,
While in the light of her large angry eyes
Uprose, and rose, a slow imperious sorrow,
And o'er the shine of still, unquivering tears
Swam on to him.

But he, with brows averse
And orgolous looks, three times to speech address'd,
Three times in vain. The silence of the place
Fell like a hand upon his heart, and hush'd
His foolish anger with authority.
He would not see the wretched Queen · he saw
Only the hunter on the arrass'd wall
Prepare to wind amort his bugle horn,
And the long daylight dying down the floors
For halfway through the golden gates of eve
The sun was roll'd. The dropping tapestry glow'd
With awful hues. Far off among his reeds
The river, smitten with a waning light,
Shone · and, behind black lengths of pine reveal'd.

The red West smoulder'd, and the day declined.
Then year by year, as wave on wave a sea,
The tided Past came softly o'er his heart,
And all the days which had been.

So he stood
Long in his mind divided: with himself
At strife: and, like a steed that hotly chafes
His silver bit, which yet some silken rein
Sway'd by a skill'd accustom'd hand restrains,
His heart against the knowledge of its love
Made vain revolt, and fretful rose and sunk.
But at the last, quelling a wayward grief,
That swell'd against all utterance, and sought
To force its salt and sorrowful overflow
Upon weak language, "Now indeed," he cried,
"I see the face of the old time is changed,
And all things alter'd! Will the sun still burn?
Still burn the eternal stars? For love was deem'd
Not less secure than these. Needs should there be
Something remarkable to prove the world
I am no more that Launcelot, nor thou
That Guenevere, of whom, long since, the fame,
Fruitful of noble deeds, with such a light
Did fill this nook and cantle of the earth,
That all great lands of Christendom beside
Show'd darken'd of their glory. But I see
That there is nothing left for men to swear by.
For then thy will did never urge me hence,
But drew me thro' all dangers to thy feet.
And none can say, least thou, I have not been
The staff and burgonet of thy fair fame.
Nor mind you, Madam, how in Surluse once,
When all the estates were met, and noble judges,
Arm'd clean with shields, set round to keep the right,
Before you sitting throned with Galahault

In great array, on fair green quilts of samyte,
Rich, ancient, fringed with gold, seven summer days,
And all before the Earls of Northgalies,
Such service then with this old sword was wrought,
To crown thy beauty in the courts of Fame,
That in that time fell many noble knights,
And all men marvell'd greatly? So when last
The loud horns blew to lodging, and we supp'd
With Palamedes and with Lamorak,
All those great dukes and kings, and famous queens,
Beholding us with a deep joy, avouch'd
Across the golden cups of costly wine
'There is no Queen of love but Guenevere,
And no true knight but Launcelot of the Lake!'"

Thus he, transported by the thought of days
And deeds that, like the mournful martial sounds
Blown thro' sad towns where some dead king goes by,
Made music in the chambers of his heart,
Swept by the mighty memory of the past.
Nor spake the sorrowful Queen, nor from deep muse
Unbent the grieving beauty of her brows,
But held her heart's proud pain superbly still.

But when he lifted up his looks, it seem'd
Something of sadness in the ancient place,
Like dying breath from lips beloved of yore,
Or unforgotten touch of tender hands
After long years, upon his spirit fell.
For near the carven casement hung the bird,
With hood and jess, that oft had led them forth,
These lovers, thro' the heart of rippling woods
At morning, in the old and pleasant time.
And o'er the broider'd canopies of state

Blazed Uther's dragons, curious, wrought with
gems.
Then to his mind that dear and distant dawn
Came back, when first, a boy at Arthur's court,
He paused abasht before the youthful Queen.
And, feeling now her long imploring gaze
Holding him in its sorrow, when he mark'd
How changed her state, and all unlike to her,
The most renownéd beauty of the time,
And pearl of chivalry, for whom himself
All on a summer's day broke, long of yore
A hundred lances in the field, he sprang
And caught her hand, and, falling to one knee,
Arch'd all his haughty neck to a quick kiss.
And there was silence. Silently the West
Grew red and redder, and the day declined.

As o'er the hungering heart of some deep sea,
That swells against the planets and the moon
With sad continual strife and vain unrest,
In silence rise and roll the labouring clouds
That bind the thunder, o'er the heaving heart
Of Guenevere all sorrows fraught with love,
All stormy sorrows, in that silence pass'd.
And like a star in that tumultuous night
Love wax'd and waned, and came and went, changed hue,
And was and was not: till the cloud came down,
And all her soul dissolved in showers: and love
Rose thro' the broken storm: and, with a cry
Of passion sheath'd in sharpest pain, she stretch'd
Wide her warm arms: she rose, she reel'd, and fell
(All her great heart unqueen'd) upon the breast
Of Launcelot; and, lifting up her voice,
She wept aloud "Unhappy that I am,"
She wept, "Unhappy! Would that I had died
Long since, long ere I loved thee Launcelot!
Would I had died long since! ere I had known

This pain, which hath become my punishment,
To have thirsted for the sea: to have received
A drop no bigger than a drop of dew!
I have done ill," she wept, "I am forlorn,
Forlorn! I falter where I stood secure:
The tower I built is fall'n, is fall'n: the staff
I lean'd upon hath broken in my hand.
And I, disrobed, dethroned, discrown'd, and all undone,
Survive my kingdom, widow'd of all rule,
And men shall mock me for a foolish Queen.
For now I see thy love for me is dead,
Dead that brief love which was the light of life,
And all is dark: and I have lived too long.
For how henceforth, unhappy, shall I bear
To dwell among these halls where we have been?
How keep these chambers emptied of thy voice?
The walks where we have linger'd long ago,
The gardens and the places of our love,
Which shall recall the days that come no more,
And all the joy which has been?"
Thus o'erthrown,
And on the breast of Launcelot weeping wild—
Weeping and murmuring—hung Queen Guenevere.
But, while she wept, upon her brows and lips
Warm kisses fell, warm kisses wet with tears.
For all his mind was melted with remorse,
And all his scorn was kill'd, and all his heart
Gave way in that caress, and all the love
Of happier years roll'd down upon his soul
Redoubled; and he bow'd his head, and cried,

"Tho' thou be variable as the waves,
More sharp than winds among the Hebrides
That shut the frozen Spring in stormy clouds,
As wayward as a child, and all unjust,
Yet must I love thee in despite of pain,
Thou peerless Queen of perfect love! Thou star

That draw'st all tides! Thou goddess far above
My heart's weak worship! so adored thou art,
And I so irretrievably all thine!
But now I will arise, as thou hast said,
And join the King: and these thine enemies
Shall know thee not defenceless any more.
For, either, living, I yet hold my life
To arm for thine, or, dying, by my death
Will steep love's injured honour in such blood
Shall wash out every stain! And so farewell
Belov'd. Forget me not when I am far,
But in thy prayers and in thine evening thoughts
Remember me: as I, when sundown crowns
The distant hills, and Ave-Mary rings,
Shall pine for thee on ways where thou art not."

So these two lovers in one long embrace,
An agony of reconcilement, hung
Blinded in tears and kisses, lip to lip,
And tranced from past and future, time and space.

But by this time, the beam of the slope day,
Edging blue mountain glooms with sullen gold,
A dying fire, fell mournfully athwart
The purple chambers. In the courts below
The shadow of the keep from wall to wall
Shook his dark skirt: great chimes began to sound,
And swing, and rock in glimmering heights, and roll
A reeling music down: but ere it fell
Faint bells in misty spires adown the vale
Caught it, and bore it floating on to night.

So from that long love-trance the envious time
Reclaim'd them. Then with a great pang he rose
Like one that pluck'd his heart out from his breast
And, bitterly unwinding her white arms
From the warm circle of their amorous fold,

Left living on her lips the lingering heat
Of one long kiss: and, gathering strongly back
His pour'd out anguish to his soul, he went.

And the sun set.

Long while she sat alone,
Searching the silence with her fixéd eyes,
While far and farther off o'er distant floors
The intervals of brazen echoes fell.
A changeful light, from varying passions caught,
Flush'd all her stately cheek from white to red
In doubtful alternation, as some star
Changes his fiery beauty: for her blood
Set headlong to all wayward moods of sense,
Stirr'd with swift ebb and flow: till suddenly all
The frozen heights of grief fell loosed, fast, fast,
In cataract over cataract, on her soul.
Then at the last she rose, a reeling shape
That like a shadow sway'd against the wall,
Her slight hand held upon her bosom, and fell
Before the Virgin Mother on her knees.
There, in a halo of the silver shrine,
That touch'd and turn'd to starlight her slow tears,
Below the feet of the pale-pictur'd saint
She lay, pour'd out in prayer.

Meanwhile, without,
A sighing rain from a low fringe of cloud
Whisper'd among the melancholy hills.
The night's dark limits widen'd: far above
The crystal sky lay open: and the star
Of eve, his rosy circlet trembling clear,
Grew large and bright, and in the silver moats,
Between the accumulated terraces,
Tangled a trail of fire: and all was still.

A SUNSET FANCY.

JUST at sunset, I would be
In some isle-garden, where the sea
I look into shall seem more blue
Than those dear and deep eyes do.
And, if anywhere the breeze
Shall have stirr'd the cypress trees,
Straight the yellow light falls thro',
Catching me, for once, at ease;
Just so much as may impinge
Some tall lily with a tinge
Of orange; while, above the wall,
Tumbles downward into view,
(With a sort of small surprise)
One star more among them all,
For me to watch with half-shut eyes.

Or else upon the breezy deck
Of some Felucca; and one speck
'Twixt the crimson and the yellow,
Which may be a little fleck
Of cloud, or gull with outstretcht neck,
To Spezia bound from Cape Circello;
With a sea-song in my ears
Of the bronzéd buccaneers:
While the night is waxing mellow,
And the helmsman slackly steers--
Leaning, talking to his fellow,
Who has oaths for all he hears —
Each thief swarthier than Othello.
Or, in fault of better things,
Close in sound of one who sings
To casements, in a southern city;
Tinkling upon tender strings
Some melodious old love-ditty;
While a laughing lady flings
One rose to him, just for pity.

But I have not any want
Sweeter than to be with you,
When the long light falleth slant,
And heaven turns a darker blue;
And a deeper smile grows thro'
The glance asleep 'neath those soft lashes,
Which the heart it steals into
First inspires and then abashes.
Just to hold your hand — one touch
So light you scarce should feel it such!
Just to watch you leaning o'er
Those window-roses, love, . . . no more.

ASSOCIATIONS.

You know the place is just the same!
The rooks build here: the sandy hill is
Ablaze with broom, as when she came
Across the sea with her new name
To dwell among the moated lilies.

The trifoly is on the walls:
The daisies in the bowling-alley:
The ox at eve lows from the stalls:
At eve the cuckoo, floating, calls,
When foxgloves tremble in the valley.

The iris blows from court to court:
The bald white spider flits, or stays in
The chinks behind the dragonwort:
That Triton still, at his old sport,
Blows bubbles in his broken basin

The terrace where she used to walk
Still shines at noon between the roses:
The garden paths are blind with chalk:
The dragonfly from stalk to stalk
Swims sparkling blue till evening closes

Then, just above that long dark copse,
One warm red star comes out, and passes
Westward, and mounts, and mounts, and stops
(Or seems to) o'er the turret-tops,
And lights those lonely casement-glasses.

Sir Ralph still wears that old grim smile.
The staircase creaks as up I clamber
To those still rooms, to muse awhile.
I see the little meadow-stile
As I lean from the great south-chamber.

And Lady Ruth is just as white.
(Ah, still, that face seems strangely like her!)
The lady and the wicked knight —
All just the same — she swoon'd for fright —
And he — his arm still raised to strike her.

Her boudoir — no one enters there:
The very flowers which last she gather'd
Are in the vase; the lute — the chair —
And all things — just as then they were!
Except the jasmins — those are wither'd.

But when along the corridors
The last red pause of day is streaming,
I seem to hear her up the floors:
I seem to see her thro' the doors:
And then I know that I am dreaming.

MEETING AGAIN.

YES; I remember the white rose. A . ince
then the young ivy has grown;
From your window we could not reac! it, and
now it is over the stone.

We did not part as we meet, Dear. Well, Time
hath his own stern cures!
And Alice's eyes are deeper, and her hair has
grown like yours.

Is our greeting all so strange then? But there's
something here amiss,
When it is not well to speak kindly. And the
olives are ripe by this.
had not thought you so alter'd. But all is
changed, God knows!
Good-night. It is night so soon now. Look
there! you have dropt your rose.

Nay, I have one that is wither'd and dearer to
me. I came
To say good-night, little Alice. She does not
remember my name.
It is but the damp that is making my head and
my heart ache so.
I never was strong in the old time, as the others
were, you know.

And you'll sleep well, will you not, Darling?
The old words sound so dear!
'Tis the last time I shall use them; you need
show neither anger nor fear.
It is well that you look so cheerful. And is time
so smooth with you?
How foolish I am! Good-night, Dear. And bid
Alice good-night too.

ARISTOCRACY.

To thee be all men heroes: every race
Noble: all women virgins: and each place
A temple: know thou nothing that is base

THE MERMAIDEN.

He was a Prince with golden hair
(In a palace beside the sea),
And I but a poor Mermaiden —
And how should he care for me?

Last summer I came, in the long blue nights,
To sit in the cool sea-caves:
Last summer he came to count the stars
From his terrace above the waves.

There's nothing so fair in the sea down there
As the light on his golden tresses:
There's nothing so sweet as his voice: ah, nothing
So warm as the warmth of his kisses!

I could not help but love him, love him,
Till my love grew pain to me.
And to-morrow he weds the Princess
In that palace beside the sea.

AT HER CASEMENT.

I am knee-deep in grass, in this warm June-night,
In the shade here, shut off from the great moon-light.
All alone, at her casement there,
She sits in the light, and she combs her hair.
She shakes it over the carven seat,
And combs it down to her stately feet.
And I watch her, hid in the blue June-night,
Till my soul grows faint with the costly sight

There's no flaw on that fair fine brow of hers,
As fair and as proud as Lucifer's.
She looks in the glass as she turns her head.
She knows that the rose on her cheek is red:
She knows how her dark eyes shine — their light
Would scarcely be dimm'd tho' I died to-night.

I would that there in her chamber I stood,
Full-face to her terrible beauty: I would
I were laid on her queenly breast, at her lips,
With her warm hair wound thro' my finger-tips,
Draining her soul at one deep-drawn kiss.
And I would be humbly content for this
To die, as is due, before the morn,
Kill'd by her slowly-returning scorn.

A FAREWELL.

Be happy, child. The last wild words are spoken.
To-morrow, mine no more, the world will claim thee.
I blame thee not. But all my life is broken.
Of that brief Past I have no single token.
Never in years to come my lips shall name thee,
Never, child, never!

I will not say "Forget me;" nor those hours
Which were so sweet. Some scent dead leaves retain.
Keep all the flowers I gave thee — all the flowers
Dead, dead! Tho' years on years of life were ours,
As we have met we shall not meet again;
Forever, child, forever!

AN EVENING IN TUSCANY.

Look! the sun sets. Now's the rarest
Hour of all the blessed day.
(Just the hour, love, you look fairest!)
Even the snails are out to play.

Cool the breeze mounts, like this Chianti
Which I drain down to the sun.
— There! shut up that old green Dante —
Turn the page, where we begun,

At the last news of Ulysses —
A grand image, fit to close
Just such grand gold eves as this is,
Full of splendour and repose!

So loop up those long bright tresses —
Only, one or two must fall
Down your warm neck Evening kisses
Thro' the soft curls spite of all.

Ah but rest in your still place there!
Stir not — turn not! the warm pleasure
Coming, going in your face there,
And the rose (no richer treasure)

In your bosom, like my love there,
Just half secret and half seen;
And the soft light from above there
Streaming o'er you where you lean,

With your fair head in the shadow
Of that grass hat's glancing brim,
Like a daisy in a meadow
Which its own deep fringes dim.

O you laugh — you cry "What folly!"
Yet you'd scarcely have me wise,
If I judge right, judging wholly
By the secret in your eyes.

But look down now, o'er the city
Sleeping soft among the hills —
Our dear Florence! That great Pitti
With its steady shadow fills

Half the town up: its unwinking
Cold white windows as they glare
Down the long streets, set one thinking
Of the old Dukes who lived there;

And one pictures those strange men so! —
Subtle brains, and iron thews!
There, the gardens of Lorenzo —
The long cypress avenues —

Creep up slow the stately hill-side
Where the merry loungers are.
But far more I love this still side —
The blue plain you see so far!

Where the shore of bright white villas
Leaves off faint: the purple breadths
Of the olives and the willows:
And the gold-rimm'd mountain-widths:

All transfused in slumbrous glory
To one burning point — the sun!
But up here — slow, cold, and hoary
Reach the olives, one by one:

And the land looks fresh: the yellow
Arbute-berries, here and there,
Growing slowly ripe and mellow
Thro' a flush of rosy hair.

For the Tramontana last week
Was about: 'Tis scarce three weeks
Since the snow lay, one white vast streak,
Upon those old purple peaks.

So to-day among the grasses
One may pick up tens and twelves
Of young olives, as one passes,
Blown about, and by themselves

Blackening sullen-ripe. The corn too
Grows each day from green to golden.
The large-eyed windflowers forlorn too
Blow among it, unbeholden:

Some white, some crimson, others
Purple blackening to the heart.
From the deep wheat-sea, which smothers
Their bright globes up, how they start!

And the small wild pinks from tender
Feather-grasses peep at us:
While above them burns, on slender
Stems, the red gladiolus:

And the grapes are green: this season
They'll be round and sound and true,
If no after-blight should seize on
Those young bunches turning blue.

O that night of purple weather!
(Just before the moon had set)
You remember how together
We walk'd home?—the grass was wet—

The long grass in the Poderé—
With the balmy dew among it:
And that Nightingale—the fairy
Song he sung—O how he sung it!

And the fig-trees had grown heavy
With the young figs white and woolly
And the fireflies, bevy on bevy
Of soft sparkles, pouring fully

Their warm life thro' trance on trance
Of thick citron-shades behind,
Rose, like swarms of loving fancies
Thro' some rich and pensive mind.

So we reach'd the Logia. Leaning
Faint, we sat there in the shade.
Neither spoke. The night's deep meaning
Fill'd the silence up unsaid.

Hoarsely thro' the Cypress-alley
A Civetta out of tune
Tried his voice by fits. The valley
Lay all dark below the moon.

Until into song you burst out —
That old song I made for you
When we found our rose — the first out
Last sweet Spring-time in the dew.

Well! . . . if things had gone less wildly
Had I settled down before
There, in England — labour'd mildly —
And been patient — and learn'd more

Of how men should live in London —
Been less happy — or more wise —
Left no great works tried, and undone —
Never look'd in your soft eyes —

I . . . but what's the use of thinking?
There! our Nightingale begins —
Now a rising note — now sinking
Back in little broken rings

Of warm song that spread and eddy —
Now he picks up heart — and draws
His great music, slow and steady,
To a silver-centred pause!

SONG.

The purple iris hangs his head
On his lean stalk, and so declines:
The spider spills his silver thread
Between the bells of columbines:
An alter'd light in flickering eves
Draws dews thro' these dim eyes of ours:
Death walks in yonder waning bowers,
And burns the blistering leaves.
Ah, well-a-day!
Blooms overblow:
Suns sink away:
Sweet things decay.

The drunken beetle, roused ere night,
Breaks blundering from the rotting rose,
Flits thro' blue spidery aconite,
And hums, and comes, and goes:
His thick, bewilder'd song receives
A drowsy sense of grief like ours:
He hums and hums among the bowers,
And bangs about the leaves.
Ah, well-a-day!
Hearts overflow:
Joy flits away:
Sweet things decay.

Her yellow stars the jasmin drops
In mildew'd mosses one by one:

The hollyhocks fall off their tops:
  The lotus-blooms ail white i' the sun:
The freckled fox-glove faints and grieves:
  The smooth-paced slumbrous slug devours
  The glewy globes of gorgeous flowers,
And smears the glistering leaves!
    Ah, well-a-day!
    Life leaves us so.
    Love dare not stay.
    Sweet things decay.

From brazen sunflowers, orb and fringe,
  The burning burnish dulls and dies:
Sad Autumn sets a sullen tinge
  Upon the scornful peonies:
The dewy frog limps out, and heaves
  A speckled lump in speckled bowers:
  A reeking moisture, clings, and lowers
The lips of lapping leaves.
    Ah, well-a-day!
    Ere the cock crow,
    Life's charm'd array
    Reels all away.

SEA-SIDE SONGS.

I.

Drop down below the orbéd sea,
  O lingering light in glowing skies,
And bring my own true-love to me—
My dear true-love across the sea—
  With tender-lighted eyes.

For now the gates of Night are flung
Wide-open her dark coasts among:
  And the happy stars crowd up, and up,
    Like bubbles that brighten, one by one,

To the dark wet brim of some glowing cup
Fill'd full to the parting sun.

And moment after moment grows
In grandeur up from deep to deep
Of darkness, till the night hath clomb,
From star to star, heaven's highest dome:
And, like a new thought born in sleep,
The slumbrous glory glows, and glows:
While, far below, a whisper goes
That heaves the happy sea:
For o'er faint tracts of fragrance wide,
A rapture pouring up the tide —
A freshness thro' the heat — a sweet,
Uncertain sound, like fairy feet —
The west wind blows my love to me.

Love-laden from the lighted west
Thou comest, with thy soul oppress
For joy of him: all up the dim,
Delicious sea blow fearlessly,
Warm wind, that art the tenderest
Of all that breathe from south or west,
Blow whispers of him up the sea:
Upon my cheek, and on my breast,
And on the lips which he hath prest,
Blow all his kisses back to me!

Far off, the dark green rocks about,
All night shines, faint and fair, the far light:
Far off, the lone, late fishers shout
From boat to boat i' the listening starlight:
Far off, and fair, the sea lies bare,
Leagues, leagues beyond the reach of rowing:
Up creek and horn the smooth wave swells
And falls asleep; or, inland flowing,
Twinkles among the silver shells,
From sluice to sluice of shallow wells;
Or, down dark pools of purple glowing,

Sets some forlorn star trembling there
In his own dim, dreamlike brilliancy.
And I feel the dark sails growing
Nearer, clearer, up the sea:
And I catch the warm west blowing
All my own love's sighs to me:
On the deck I hear them singing
Songs they sing in my own land:
Lights are swinging: bells are ringing:
On the deck I see him stand!

II.

The day is down into his bower:
In languid lights his feet he steeps:
The flusht sky darkens, low and lower,
And closes on the glowing deeps.

In creeping curves of yellow foam
Up shallow sands the waters slide:
And warmly blow what whispers roam
From isle to isle the lulléd tide:

The boats are drawn: the nets drip bright:
Dark casements gleam: old songs are sung:
And out upon the verge of night
Green lights from lonely rocks are hung.

O winds of eve that somewhere rove
Where darkest sleeps the distant sea,
Seek out where haply dreams my love,
And whisper all her dreams to me!

THE SUMMER-TIME THAT WAS.

THE swallow is not come yet;
The river banks are brown;

The wood-side walks are dumb yet,
And dreary is the town.
I miss a face from the window,
A footstep from the grass;
I miss the boyhood of my heart,
And the summer-time that was.

How shall I read the books I read,
Or meet the men I met?
I thought to find her rose-tree dead,
But it is growing yet.
And the river winds among the flags,
And the leaf lies on the grass.
But I walk alone. My hopes are gone,
And the summer-time that was.

ELAYNE LE BLANC.

O THAT sweet season on the April-verge
Of womanhood! When smiles are toucht with tears,
And all the unsolaced summer seems to grieve
With some blind want: when Eden-exiles feel
Their Paradisal parentage, and search
Even yet some fragrance thro' the thorny years
From reachless gardens guarded by the sword.

Then those that brood above the fallen sun,
Or lean from lonely casements to the moon,
Turn round and miss the touching of a hand:
Then sad thoughts seem to be more sweet than gay ones:
Then old songs have a sound as pitiful
As dead friends' voices, sometimes heard in dreams:
And all a-tiptoe for some great event,
The Present waits, her finger at her lips,

The while the pensive Past with meek pale palms,
Crost (where a child should lie) on her cold breast,
And wistful eyes forlorn, stands mutely by,
Reproaching Life with some unutter'd loss;
And the heart pines, a prison'd Danaë,
Till some God comes, and makes the air all golden

In such a mood as this, at such an hour
As makes sad thoughts fall saddest on the soul,
She, in her topmost Bower all alone,
High-up among the battlemented roofs,
Lean'd from the lattice, where the road runs by
To Camelot, and in the bulrush beds
The marish river shrinks his stagnant horn.
All round, along the spectral arras, gleam'd
(With faces pale against the dreary light)
Forms of great Queens—the women of old times.
She felt their frowns upon her, and their smiles,
And seem'd to hear their garments rustling near.
Her lute lay idle her love-books among:
And, at her feet, flung by, the broider'd scarf,
And velvet mantle. On the verge of night
She saw a bird float by, and wish'd for wings:
She heard the hoarse frogs quarrel in the marsh:
And now and then, with drowsy song and oar,
Some dim barge sliding slow from bridge to bridge,
Down the white river past, and far behind
Left a new silence. Then she fell to muse
Unto what end she came into this earth
Whose reachless beauty made her heart so sad,
As one that loves, but hopes not, inly ails
In gazing on some fair unloving face.
Anon, there dropt down a great gulf of sky
A star she knew; and as she look'd at it,
Down-drawn thro' her intensity of gaze,
One angry ray fell tangled in her tears,
And dash'd its blinding brightness in her eyes.
She turn'd, and caught her lute, and pensively

Rippled a random music down the strings,
And sang . . .

All night the moonbeams bathe the sward.
There's not an eye to-night in Joyous-Gard
That is not dreaming something sweet. I wake
Because it is more sweet to dream awake:
Dreaming I see thy face upon the lake.

I am come up from far, love, to behold thee,
That hast waited for me so bravely and well
Thy sweet life long (for the Fairies had told thee
I am the Knight that shall loosen the spell)
And to-morrow morn mine arms shall enfold thee:
And to-morrow night . . . . . ah, who can tell?

As the spirit of some dark lake
Pines at nightfall, wild-awake,
For the approaching consummation
Of a great moon he divines
Coming to her coronation
Of the dazzling stars and signs,
So my heart, my heart,
Darkly (ah, and tremblingly!)
Waits in mystic expectation
(From its wild source far apart)
Until it be fill'd with thee —
With the full-orb'd light of thee —
O belovéd as thou art!
With the soft sad smile that flashes
Underneath thy long dark lashes;
And thy floating raven hair,
From its wreathéd pearls let slip;
And thy breath, like balmy air;
And thy warm wet rosy lip,
With my first kiss lingering there;
Its sweet secret unreveal'd —
Seal'd by me, to me unseal'd;
And . . . . . but, ah! she lies asleep

In yon gray stone castle-keep,
On her lids the happy tear;
And alone I linger here;
And to-morrow morn the fight;
And . . . . ah, me! to-morrow night?

Here she brake, trembling, off; and on the lute,
Yet vibrating thro' its melodious nerves,
A great tear plash'd and tinkled. For awhile
She sat and mused; and, heavily, drop by drop,
Her tears fell down; then thro' them a slow smile
Stole, full of April-sweetness; and she sang —
— It was a sort of ballad of the sea:
A song of weather-beaten mariners,
Gray-headed men that had survived all winds
And held a perilous sport among the waves,
Who yet sang on with hearts as bold as when
They clear'd their native harbour with a shout,
And lifted golden anchors in the sun.

Merrily, merrily drove our barks —
Merrily up from the morning beach!
And the brine broke under the prows in sparks;
For a spirit sat high at the helm of each.
We sail'd all day; and, when day was done,
Steer'd after the wake of the sunken sun,
For we meant to follow him out of reach
Till the golden dawn was again begun.

With lifted oars, with shout and song,
Merry mariners all were we!
Every heart beat stout and strong.
Thro' all the world you would not see,
Tho' you should journey wide and long,
A comelier company.
And where, the echoing creeks among,
Merrily, steadily,
From bay to bay our barks did fall,

You might hear us singing, one and all,
A song of the mighty sea.
But, just as twilight, down the rocks
Dim forms troop'd fast, and clearer grew:
For out upon the sea-sand came
The island-people, whom we knew,
And call'd us: — girls with glowing locks;
And sunburnt boys that tend the herd
Far up the vale; gray elders too
With silver beards: — their cries we heard:
They call'd us, each one by his name.

"Could ye not wait a little while,"
We heard them sing, "for all our sakes?
A little while, in this old isle,"
They sung, "among the silver lakes?
For here," they sung, "from horn to horn
Of flowery bays the land is fair:
The hill-side glows with grapes: the corn
Grows golden in the vale down there.
Our maids are sad for you," they sung:
"Against the field no sickle falls:
Upon the trees our harps are hung:
Our doors are void: and in the stalls
The little foxes nest; among
The herd-roved hills no shepherd calls:
Your brethren mourn for you," they sung.
"Here weep your wives: here pass'd your lives
Among the vines, when you were young:
Here dwell your sires: your household fires
Grow cold. Return! return!" they sung.

Then each one saw his kinsman stand
Upon the shore, and wave his hand:
And each grew sad. But still we sung
Our ocean-chorus bold and clear;
And still upon our oars we hung,
And held our course with steadfast cheer.

"For we are bound for distant shores,"
We cried, and faster swept our oars:
"We pine to see the faces there
Of men whose deeds we heard long since,
Who haunt our dreams: gray heroes: kings
Whose fame the wandering minstrel sings:
And maidens, too, more fair than ours,
With deeper eyes, and softer hair,
Like hers that left her island bowers
To wed the sullen Cornish Prince
Who keeps his court upon the hill
By the gray coasts of Tyntagill,
And each, before he dies, must gain
Some fairy-land across the main."

But still "return, belov'd, return!"
The simple island-people sung:
And still each mariner's heart did burn,
As each his kinsman could discern,
Those dim green rocks among.

"O'er you the rough sea-blasts will blow,"
They sung, "while here the skies are fair:
Our paths are thro' the fields we know:
And yours you know not where."

But we waved our hands . . . "farewell! farewell!"
We cried . . "our white sails flap the mast:
Our course is set: our oars are wet:
One day" we cried, "is nearly past:
One day at sea! Farewell! farewell!
No more with you we now may dwell!"

And the next day we were driving free
(With never a sail in sight)
Over the face of the mighty sea
And we counted the stars next night
Rise over us by two and three

With melancholy light:
A grave-eyed, earnest company —
And all round the salt foam white!

With this, she ceased, and sigh'd . . "tho' I were far,
I know yon moated iris would not shed
His purple crown: yon clover-field would ripple
As merry in the waving wind as now:
As soft the Spring down this bare hill would steal,
And in the vale below fling all her flowers:
Each year the wet primroses star the woods:
And violets muffle the sharp rivulets:
Round this lone casement's solitary panes
The wandering ivy move and mount each year:
Each year the red wheat gleam near river-banks:
While, ah, with each my memory from the hearts
Of men would fade, and from their lips my name.
O which were best — the wide, the windy sea,
With golden gleams of undiscover'd lands,
Odours, and murmurs — or the placid Port,
From wanton winds, from scornful waves secure,
Under the old, green, happy hills of home?"
She sat forlorn, and ponder'd. Night was near,
And, marshalling o'er the hills her dewy camps,
Came down the outposts of the sentinel stars.
All in the owlet light she sat forlorn.

Now hostle, hall, and grange, that eve were cramm'd:
The town being choked to bursting of the gates:
For there the King yet lay with all his Earls,
And the Round Table, numbering all save one.

On many a curving terrace which o'erhung
The long gray river, swan-like, thro' the green
Of quaintest yews, moved, pacing stately by,
The lovely ladies of King Arthur's court.
Sighing, she eyed them from that lonely keep.

The Dragon-banners o'er the turrets droop'd,
The heavy twilight hanging in their folds.
And now and then, from posterns in the wall
The Knights stole, lingering for some last Good-night,
Whisper'd or sigh'd thro' closing lattices;
Or paused with reverence of bending plumes,
And lips on jewell'd fingers gayly prest.
The silver cressets shone from pane to pane:
And tapers flitted by with flitting forms:
Clang'd the dark streets with clash of iron heels:
Or fell a sound of coits in clattering courts,
And drowsy horse-boys singing in the straw.

These noises floated upward. And within,
From the great Hall, forever and anon,
Brake gusts of revel; snatches of wild song,
And laughter; where, her sire among his men
Caroused between the twilight and the dark.
The silence round about her where she sat,
Vext in itself, grew sadder for the sound.
She closed her eyes: before them seem'd to float
A dream of lighted revels — dance and song
In Guenver's palace: gorgeous tournaments;
And rows of glittering eyes about the Queen,
(Like stars in galaxies around the moon)
That sparkled recognition down below,
Where rode the Knights amort with lance and plume;
And each his lady's sleeve upon his helm:
Murmuring . . . "none ride for me. Am I not fair,
Whom men call the White Flower of Astolat?"

Far, far without, the wild gray marish spread,
A heron startled from the pools, and flapp'd
The water from his wings, and skirr'd away.
The last long limit of the dying light
Dropp'd, all on fire, behind an iron cloud:

And, here and there, thro' some wild chasm of blue,
Tumbled a star. The mist upon the fens
Thicken'd. A billowy opal grew i' the crofts,
Fed on the land, and suck'd into itself
Paling and park, close copse and bushless down,
Changing the world for Fairies.
Then the moon
In the low east, unprison'd from black bars
Of stagnant fog (a white light, wrought to the full,
Summ'd in a perfect orb) rose suddenly up
Upon the silence with a great surprise,
And took the inert landscape unawares.

White, white, the snaky river: dark the banks:
And dark the folding distance, where her eyes
Were wildly turn'd, as tho' the whole world lay
In that far blackness over Carlyel.
There she espied Sir Launcelot, as he rode
His coal-black courser downward from afar,
For all his armour glitter'd as he went,
And show'd like silver: and his mighty shield,
By dint of knightly combat hackt and worn,
Look'd like some crackt and frozen moon that hangs
By night o'er Baltic headlands all alone.

TO —.

As, in lone fairy-lands, up some rich shelf
Of golden sand the wild wave moaningly
Heaps its unvalued sea-wealth, weed and gem,
Then creeps back slow into the salt sad sea:
So from my life's new searchéd deeps to thee,
Belov'd, I cast these weed-flowers. Smile on them.

More than they mean I know not to express.
So I shrink back into my old sad self,
Far from all words where love lies fathomless

QUEEN GUENEVERE.

THENCE, up the sea-green floor, among the stems
Of mighty columns whose unmeasured shades
From aisle to aisle, unheeded in the sun,
Moved without sound, I, following all alone
A strange desire that drew me like a hand,
Came unawares upon the Queen.
She sat
In a great silence, which her beauty fill'd
Full to the heart of it, on a black chair
Mail'd all about with sullen gems, and crusts
Of sultry blazonry. Her face was bow'd,
A pause of slumbrous beauty, o'er the light
Of some delicious thought new-risen above
The deeps of passion. Round her stately head
A single circlet of the red gold fine
Burn'd free, from which, on either side stream'd down
Twilights of her soft hair, from neck to foot.
Green was her kirtle as the emerolde is,
And stiff from hem to hem with seams of stones
Beyond all value; which, from left to right
Disparting, half reveal'd the snowy gleam
Of a white robe of spotless samyte pure.
And from the soft repression of her zone.
Which like a light hand on a lutestring press'd
Harmony from its touch, flow'd warmly back
The bounteous outlines of a glowing grace,
Nor yet outflow'd sweet laws of loveliness.

Then did I feel as one who, much perplext,
Led by strange legends and the light of stars

Over long regions of the midnight sand
Beyond the red tract of the Pyramids,
Is suddenly drawn to look upon the sky
From sense of unfamiliar light, and sees,
Reveal'd against the constellated cope
The great cross of the South.
The chamber round
Was dropt with arras green; and I could hear,
In courts far off, a minstrel praising May,
Who sang . . . *Si douce, si douce est la Margarete!*
To a faint lute. Upon the window-sill,
Hard by a latoun bowl that blazed i' the sun
Perch'd a strange fowl, a Falcon Perigrine;
With all his feathers puft for pride, and all
His courage glittering outward in his eye;
For he had flown from far, athwart strange lands,
And o'er the light of many a setting sun,
Lured by his love (such sovereignty of old
Had Beauty in all coasts of Christendom!)
To look into the great eyes of the Queen.

THE NEGLECTED HEART.

This heart, you would not have,
I laid up in a grave
Of song: with love enwound it;
And set sweet fancies blowing round it.
Then I to others gave it;
Because you would not have it.
"See you keep it well," I said;
"This heart's sleeping — is not dead;
But will wake some future day:
See you keep it while you may."

All great Sorrows in the world, —
Some with crowns upon their heads,
And in regal purple furl'd;

Some with rosaries and beads;
Some with lips of scorning, curl'd
At false Fortune; some, in weeds
Of mourning and of widowhood,
Standing tearful and apart —
Each one in his several mood,
Came to take my heart.

Then in holy ground they set it:
With melodious weepings wet it:
And revered it as they found it,
With wild fancies blowing round it.

And this heart (you would not have)
Being not dead, tho' in the grave,
Work'd miracles and marvels strange,
And heal'd many maladies:
Giving sight to seal'd-up eyes,
And legs to lame men sick for change.

The fame of it grew great and greater.
Then said you "Ah, what's the matter?
How hath this heart, I would not take,
This weak heart, a child might break —
This poor, foolish heart of his —
Since won worship such as this?"

You bethought you then . . . "Ah me
What if this heart, I did not choose
To retain, hath found the key
Of the kingdom? and I lose
A great power? Me he gave it:
Mine the right, and I will have it."

Ah, too late! For crowds exclaim'd
"Ours it is: and hath been claim'd.
Moreover, where it lies, the spot
Is holy ground: so enter not.
None but men of mournful mind —

Men to darken'd days resign'd;
Equal scorn of Saint and Devil;
Poor and outcast; halt and blind;
Exiles from Life's golden revel;
Gnawing at the bitter rind
Of old griefs; or else, confined
In proud cares, to serve and grind,—
May enter: whom this heart shall cure.
But go thou by: thou art not poor:
Nor defrauded of thy lot:
Bless thyself: but enter not!"

APPEARANCES.

WELL, you have learn'd to smile.
And no one looks for traces
Of tears about your eyes.
Your face is like most faces.
And who will ask, meanwhile,
If your face your heart belies?

Are you happy? You look so.
Well, I wish you what you seem.
Happy persons sleep so light!
In your sleep you never dream?
But who would care to know
What dreams you dream'd last night?

HOW THE SONG WAS MADE.

I SAT low down, at midnight, in a vale
Mysterious with the silence of blue pines:
White-cloven by a snaky river-tail,
Uncoil'd from tangled wefts of silver twines.

But of a crumbling castle, on a spike
Of splinter'd rock, a mile of changeless shade
Gorged half the landscape. Down a dismal dyke
Of black hills the sluiced moonbeams stream'd,
and staid.

The world lay like a poet in a swoon,
When God is on him, fill'd with heaven all thro'—
A dim face full of dreams turn'd to the moon,
With mild lips moist in melancholy dew.

I pluck'd blue mugwort, livid mandrakes, balls
Of blossom'd nightshade, heads of hemlock, long
White grasses, grown in oozy intervals
Of marsh, to make ingredients for a song:

A song of mourning to embalm the Past—
The corpse-cold Past—that it should not decay;
But in dark vaults of memory, to the last,
Endure unchanged: for in some future day

I will bring my new love to look at it
(Laying aside her gay robes for a moment)
That, seeing what love came to, she may sit
Silent awhile, and muse, but make no comment.

RETROSPECTIONS.

TO-NIGHT she will dance at the Palace,
With the diamonds in her hair:
And the Prince will praise her beauty—
The loveliest lady there!

But tones, at times, in the music
Will bring back forgotten things:
And her heart will fail her sometimes,
When her beauty is praised at the King's.

There sits in his silent chamber
A stern and sorrowful man:
But a strange sweet dream comes to him,
While the lamp is burning wan,

Of a sunset among the vineyards
In a lone and lovely land,
And a maiden standing near him,
With fresh wild-flowers in her hand.

THY VOICE ACROSS MY SPIRIT FALLS

Thy voice across my spirit falls
Like some spent sea-wind thro' dim halls
Of ocean-kings, left bare and wide
(Green floors o'er which the sea-weed crawls!)
Where once, long since, in festal pride
Some Chief, who roved and ruled the tide,
Among his brethren reign'd and died.

I dare not meet thine eyes; for so,
In gazing there, I seem once more
To lapse away thro' days of yore
To homes where laugh and song is o'er,
Whose inmates each went long ago —

Like some lost soul, that keeps the semblance
On its brow of ancient grace
Not all faded, wandering back
To silent chambers, in the track
Of the twilight, from the Place
Of retributive Remembrance.
Ah, turn aside those eyes again!
Their light has less of joy than pain.
We are not now what we were then.

THE RUINED PALACE.

BROKEN are the Palace windows:
Rotting is the Palace floor.
The damp wind lifts the arras,
And swings the creaking door;
But it only startles the white owl
From his perch on a monarch's throne,
And the rat that was gnawing the harpstrings
A Queen once play'd upon.

Dare you linger here at midnight
Alone, when the wind is about,
And the bat, and the newt, and the viper,
And the creeping things come out?
Beware of these ghostly chambers!
Search not what my heart hath been,
Lest you find a phantom sitting
Where once there sat a Queen.

A VISION OF VIRGINS.

I HAD a vision of the night.

It seem'd
There was a long red tract of barren land,
Blockt in by black hills, where a half-moon dream'd
Of morn, and whiten'd.
Drifts of dry brown sand,
This way and that, were heapt below: and flats
Of water: — glaring shallows, where strange bats
Came and went, and moths flicker'd.
To the right,
A dusty road that crept along the waste

Like a white snake: and, further up, I traced
The shadow of a great house, far in sight:
A hundred casements all ablaze with light:
And forms that flit athwart them as in haste:
And a slow music, such as sometimes kings
Command at mighty revels, softly sent
From viol, and flute, and tabor, and the strings
Of many a sweet and slumbrous instrument
That wound into the mute heart of the night
Out of that distance.
Then I could perceive
A glory pouring thro' an open door,
And in the light five women. I believe
They wore white vestments, all of them. They were
Quite calm; and each still face unearthly fair,
Unearthly quiet. So like statues all,
Waiting they stood without that lighted hall;
And in their hands, like a blue star, they held
Each one a silver lamp.
Then I beheld
A shadow in the doorway. And One came
Crown'd for a feast. I could not see the Face.
The Form was not all human. As the flame
Stream'd over it, a presence took the place
With awe.
He, turning, took them by the hand,
And led them each up the white stairway, and
The door closed.

At that moment the moon dipp'd
Behind a rag of purple vapour, ript
Off a great cloud, some dead wind, ere it spent
Its last breath, had blown open, and so rent
You saw behind blue pools of light, and there
A wild star swimming in the lurid air.
The dream was darken'd. And a sense of loss
Fell like a nightmare on the land: because
The moon yet linger'd in her cloud-eclipse.

Then, in the dark, swell'd sullenly across
The waste a wail of women.
Her blue lips
The moon drew up out of the cloud.
Again
I had a vision on that midnight plain.

Five women: and the beauty of despair
Upon their faces: locks of wild wet hair,
Clammy with anguish, wander'd low and loose
O'er their bare breasts, that seem'd too fill'd with trouble
To feel the damp crawl of the midnight dews
That trickled down them. One was bent half-double,
A dismay'd heap, that hung o'er the last spark
Of a lamp slowly dying. As she blew
The dull light redder, and the dry wick flew
In crumbling sparkles all about the dark,
I saw a light of horror in her eyes;
A wild light on her flusht cheek; a wild white
On her dry lips; an agony of surprise
Fearfully fair.
The lamp dropp'd. From my sight
She fell into the dark.
Beside her, sat
One without motion: and her stern face flat
Against the dark sky.
One, as still as death,
Hollow'd her hands about her lamp, for fear
Some motion of the midnight, or her breath,
Should fan out the last flicker. Rosy-clear
The light oozed, thro' her fingers, o'er her face.
There was a ruin'd beauty hovering there
Over deep pain, and, dasht with lurid grace
A waning bloom.
The light grew dim and blear·
And she, too, slowly darken'd in her place.

Another, with her white hands hotly lockt
About her damp knees, muttering madness, rock'd
Forward, and backward. But at last she stopp'd,
And her dark head upon her bosom dropp'd
Motionless.
Then one rose up with a cry
To the great moon; and stretch'd a wrathful arm
Of wild expostulation to the sky,
Murmuring — "These earth-lamps fail us! and
what harm?
Does not the moon shine? Let us rise and hast
To meet the Bridegroom yonder o'er the waste!
For now I seem to catch once more the tone
Of viols on the night. 'Twere better done,
At worst, to perish near the golden gate,
And fall in sight of glory one by one,
Than here all night upon the wild, to wait
Uncertain ills. Away! the hour is late!"

Again the moon dipp'd.
I could see no more.
Not the least gleam of light did heaven afford.

At last, I heard a knocking on a door,
And some one crying "Open to us, Lord!"
There was an awful pause.
I heard my heart
Beat.
Then a Voice—"I know you not. Depart."
I caught, within, a glimpse of glory. And
The door closed.
Still in darkness dream'd the land.
I could not see those women. Not a breath!
Darkness, and awe: a darkness more than death.
The darkness took them. * * * * *

LEOLINE.

In the molten-golden moonlight,
In the deep grass warm and dry,
We watch'd the fire-fly rise and swim
In floating sparkles by.
All night the hearts of nightingales,
Song-steeping, slumbrous leaves,
Flow'd to us in the shadow there
Below the cottage-eaves.

We sang our songs together
Till the stars shook in the skies.
We spoke — we spoke of common things,
Yet the tears were in our eyes.
And my hand — I know it trembled
To each light warm touch of thine.
But we were friends, and only friends,
My sweet friend, Leoline!

How large the white moon look'd, Dear!
There has not ever been
Since those old nights the same great light
In the moons which I have seen.
I often wonder, when I think,
If you have thought so too,
And the moonlight has grown dimmer, Dear,
Than it used to be to you.

And sometimes, when the warm west wind
Comes faint across the sea,
It seems that you have breath'd on it,
So sweet it comes to me:
And sometimes, when the long light wanes
In one deep crimson line,
I muse, "and does she watch it too,
Far off, sweet Leoline?"

And often, leaning all day long
My head upon my hands,
My heart aches for the vanisht time
In the far fair foreign lands:
Thinking sadly — "Is she happy?
Has she tears for those old hours?
And the cottage in the starlight?
And the songs among the flowers?"

One night we sat below the porch,
And out in that warm air,
A fire-fly, like a dying star,
Fell tangled in her hair;
But I kiss'd him lightly off again,
And he glitter'd up the vine,
And died into the darkness
For the love of Leoline!

Between two songs of Petrarch
I've a purple rose-leaf prest,
More sweet than common rose-leaves,
For it once lay in her breast.
When she gave me that her eyes were wet
The rose was full of dew.
The rose is wither'd long ago:
The page is blister'd too.

There's a blue flower in my garden,
The bee loves more than all:
The bee and I, we love it both,
Tho' it is frail and small.
She loved it too — long, long ago!
Her love was less than mine.
Still we are friends, but only friends,
My lost love, Leoline!

SPRING AND WINTER.

THE world buds every year:
  But the heart just once, and when
The blossom falls off sere
  No new blossom comes again.
Ah, the rose goes with the wind:
But the thorns remain behind.

Was it well in him, if he
  Felt not love, to speak of love so?
If he still unmoved must be,
  Was it nobly sought to move so?
—Pluck the flower, and yet not wear it—
Spurn, despise it, yet not spare it?

Need he say that I was fair,
  With such meaning in his tone,
Just to speak of one whose hair
  Had the same tinge as my own?
Pluck my life up, root and bloom,
Just to plant it on her tomb?

And she'd scarce so fair a face
  (So he used to say) as mine:
And her form had far less grace:
  And her brow was far less fine:
But 'twas just that he loved then
More than he can love again.

Why, if Beauty could not bind him,
  Need he praise me, speaking low:
Use my face just to remind him
  How no face could please him now?
Why, if loving could not move him,
Did he teach me still to love him?

And he said my eyes were bright,
  But his own, he said, were dim;

And my hand, he said, was white,
But what was that to him?
"For," he said, "in gazing at you,
I seem gazing at a statue."

"Yes!" he said, "he had grown wise now:
He had suffer'd much of yore:
But a fair face to his eyes now,
Was a fair face, and no more.
Yet the anguish and the bliss,
And the dream too, had been his."

Then, why talk of "lost romances"
Being "sick of sentiment!"
And what meant those tones and glances
If real love was never meant?
Why, if his own youth were wither'd,
Must mine also have been gather'd?

Why those words a thought too tender
For the common-places spoken?
Looks whose meaning seem'd to render
Help to words when speech came broken?
Why so late in July moonlight
Just to say what's said by noonlight?

And why praise my youth for gladness
Keeping something in his smile
Which turn'd all my youth to sadness,
He still smiling all the while?
Since, when so my youth was over
He said—"Seek some younger lover!"

"For the world buds once a year
But the heart just once," he said.
True! . . . so now that Spring is here
All my flowers, like his, are dead.
And the rose drops in the wind.
But the thorns remain behind.

KING HERMANDIAZ.

THEN, standing by the shore, I saw the moon
Change hue, and dwindle in the west, as when
Warm looks fade inward out of dying eyes,
And the dim sea began to moan.
I knew
My hour had come, and to the bark I went.
Still were the stately decks, and hung with silk
Of stoléd crimson: at the masthead burn'd
A steadfast fire with influence like a star,
And underneath a couch of gold. I loosed
The dripping chain. There was not any wind:
But all at once the magic sails began
To belly and heave, and like a bat that wakes
And flits by night, beneath her swarthy wings
The black ship rock'd, and moved. I heard anon
A humming in the cordage and a sound
Like bees in summer, and the bark went on,
And on, and on, until at last the world
Was roll'd away and folded out of sight,
And I was all alone on the great sea.
There a deep awe fell on my spirit. My wound
Began to bite. I, gazing round, beheld
A Lady sitting silent at the helm,
A woman white as death, and fair as dreams.
I would have asked her "Whither do we sail?"
And "how?" but that my fear clung at my heart,
And held me still. She, answering my doubt,
Said slowly, "To the Isle of Avalon."

And straightway we were nigh a strand all gold,
That glittered in the moon between the dusk
Of hanging bowers made rich with blooms and
balms,
From which faint gusts came to me; and I heard
A sound of lutes among the vales, and songs
And voices faint like voices thro' a dream
That said or seem'd to say, "Hail Hermandiaz!"

SONG.

In the warm, black mill-pool winking,
The first doubtful star shines blue:
And alone here I lie thinking
O such happy thoughts of you!

Up the porch the roses clamber,
And the flowers we sow'd last June;
And the casement of your chamber
Shines between them to the moon.

Look out, love! fling wide the lattice:
Wind the red rose in your hair,
And the little white clematis
Which I pluck'd for you to wear:

Or come down, and let me hear you
Singing in the scented grass,
Thro' tall cowslips nodding near you,
Just to touch you as you pass.

For, where you pass, the air
With warm hints of love grows wise:
You — the dew on your dim hair,
And the smile in your soft eyes!

From the hayfield comes your brother;
There, your sisters stand together,
Singing clear to one another
Thro' the dark blue summer weather,

And the maid the latch is clinking,
As she lets her lover thro':
But alone, love, I lie thinking
O such tender thoughts of you!

THE SWALLOW.

O SWALLOW chirping in the sparkling eaves,
Why hast thou left far south thy fairy homes,
To build between these drenchéd April-leaves,
And sing me songs of Spring before it comes?
Too soon thou singest! Yon black stubborn thorn
Bursts not a bud: the sneaping wind drifts on.
She that once flung thee crumbs, and in the morn
Sang from the lattice where thou sing'st, is gone.
Here is no Spring. Thy flight yet further follow.
Fly off, vain swallow!

Thou com'st to mock me with remember'd things.
I love thee not, O bird for me too gay.
That which I want thou hast — the gift of wings:
Grief — which I have — thou hast not. Fly away!
What hath my roof for thee? My cold dark roof,
Beneath whose weeping thatch thine eggs will freeze!
Summer will halt not here, so keep aloof.
Others are gone; go thou. In those wet trees
I see no Spring tho' thou still singest of it
Fare hence, false prophet!

CONTRABAND.

A HEAP of low, dark, rocky coast,
Where the blue-black sea sleeps smooth and even:
And the sun, just over the reefs at most,
In the amber part of a pale blue heaven:

A village asleep below the pines,
Hid up the gray shore from the low slow sun ·
And a maiden that lingers among the vines,
With her feet in the dews, and her locks un done :

The half-moon melting out of the sky ;
And, just to be seen still, a star here, a star there,
Faint, high up in the heart of the heaven ; so high
And so faint, you can scarcely be sure that they are there.

And one of that small, black, raking craft ;
Two swivel guns on a round deck handy ;
And a great sloop sail with the wind abaft ;
And four brown thieves round a cask of brandy.

That's my life, as I left it last.
And what it may be henceforth I know not.
But all that I keep of the merry Past,
Are trifles like these, which I care to show not : —

A leathern flask, and a necklace of pearl ;
These rusty pistols, this tatter'd chart, Friend
And the soft dark half of a raven curl ;
And, at evening, the thought of a true, tru heart, Friend.

EVENING.

Already evening ! In the duskiest nook
Of yon dusk corner, under the Death's-head,
Between the alembecs, thrust this legended,
And iron-bound, and melancholy book,

For I will read no longer. The loud brook
Shelves his sharp light up shallow banks thin-spread;
The slumbrous west grows slowly red, and red:
Up from the ripen'd corn her silver hook
The moon is lifting: and deliciously
Along the warm blue hills the day declines:
The first star brightens while she waits for me,
And round her swelling heart the zone grows tight:
Musing, half-sad, in her soft hair she twines
The white rose, whispering "he will come to-night!"

ADON.

I WILL not weep for Adon!
I will not waste my breath to draw thick sighs
For spring's dead greenness. All the orient skies
Are husht, and breathing out a bright surprise
Round morning's marshalling star: Rise, Eos, rise!
Day's dazzling spears are up: the faint stars fade on
The white hills — cold, like Adon!

O'er crag, and spar, and splinter
Break down, and roll the amber mist, stern light
The black pines dream of dawn. The skirts of night
Are ravell'd in the East. And planted bright
In heaven, the roots of ice shine, sharp and white,
In frozen ray, and spar, and spike, and splinter.
Within me, and without, all's winter.

Why should I weep for Adon?
Am I because the sweet Past is no more,
Dead, as the leaves upon the graves of yore?
I will breathe boldly, tho' the air be frore

With freezing fire. Life still beats at the core
Of the world's heart, tho' Death his awe hath laid on
This dumb white corpse of Adon.

THE PROPHET.

When the East lightens with strange hints of morn,
The first tinge of the growing glory takes
The cold crown of some husht high alp forlorn,
While yet o'er vales below the dark is spread.
Even so the dawning Age, in silence, breaks,
O solitary soul, on thy still head:
And we, that watch below with reverent fear,
Seeing thee crown'd, do know that day is near.

WEALTH.

Was it not enough to dream the day to death
Grandly? and finely feed on faint perfumes?
Between the heavy lilacs draw thick breath,
While the noon humm'd from glowing citron-glooms?

Or walk with Morning in these dewy bowers,
'Mid sheavéd lilies, and the moth-loved lips
Of purple asters, bearded flat sunflowers,
And milkwhite crumpled pinks with blood i' the tips?

But I must also, gazing upon thee,
Pine with delicious pain, and subtle smart,
Till I felt heavy immortality,
Laden with looks of thine, weigh on my heart!

WANT.

You swore you lov'd me all last June:
  And now December's come and gone.
The Summer went with you — too soon.
  The Winter goes — alone.

Next Spring the leaves will all be green:
  But love like ours, once turn'd to pain,
Can be no more what it hath been,
  Tho' roses bloom again.

Return, return the unvalued wealth
  I gave! which scarcely profits you —
The heart's lost youth — the soul's lost health —
  In vain! . . . false friend, adieu!

I keep one faded violet
  Of all once ours — you left no more.
What I have lost I may forget,
  But you cannot restore.

A BIRD AT SUNSET.

Wild bird, that wingest wide the glimmering moors,
  Whither, by belts of yellowing woods away?
With pausing sunset thy wild heart allures
  Deep into dying day?

Would that my heart, on wings like thine, could pass
  Where stars their light in rosy regions lose —
A happy shadow o'er the warm brown grass,
  Falling with falling dews!

Hast thou, like me, some true-love of thine own,
In fairy lands beyond the utmost seas;
Who there, unsolaced, yearns for thee alone,
And sings to silent trees?

O tell that woodbird that the summer grieves,
And the suns darken and the days grow cold;
And, tell her, love will fade with fading leaves,
And cease in common mould.

Fly from the winter of the world to her!
Fly happy bird! I follow in thy flight,
Till thou art lost o'er yonder fringe of fir
In baths of crimson light.

My love is dying far away from me.
She sits and saddens in the fading west.
For her I mourn all day, and pine to be
At night upon her breast.

IN TRAVEL.

Now our white sail flutters down:
Now it broadly takes the breeze:
Now the wharves upon the town,
Lessening, leave us by degrees.
Blithely blows the morning, shaking
On your cheek the loosen'd curls:
Round our prow the cleft wave, breaking,
Tumbles off in heapéd pearls,
Which in forks of foam unite,
And run seething out to sea,
Where o'er gleams of briny light,
Dip the dancing gulls in glee.
Now the mountain serpentine
Slips out many a snaky line

Down the dark blue ocean-spine.
From the boatside, while we pass,
I can see, as in a glass,
Pirates on the flat sea-sand,
Carousing ere they put from land;
And the purple-pointed crests
Of hills whereon the morning rests
Whose ethereal vivid peaks
Glimmer in the lucid creeks.
Now these wind away; and now
Hamlets up the mountain-brow
Peep and peer from roof to roof;
And gray castle-walls aloof
O'er wide vineyards just in grape,
From whose serfs old Barons held
Tax and toll in feudal eld,
Creep out of the uncoiling cape.
Now the long low layer of mist
A slow trouble rolls and lifts,
With a broken billowy motion,
From the rocks and from the rifts,
Laying bare, just here and there,
Black stone-pines, at morn dew-kist
By salt winds from bound to bound
Of the great sea freshening round;
Wattled folds on bleak brown down
Sloping high o'er sleepy towns;
Lengths of shore and breadths of ocean.

Love, lean here upon my shoulder,
And look yonder, love, with me:
Now I think that I can see
In the merry market-places
Sudden warmths of sunny faces:
Many a lovely laughing maiden
Bearing on her loose dark locks
Rich fruit-baskets heavy-laden,
In and out among the rocks,
Knowing not that we behold her.

Now, love, tell me can you hear,
Growing nearer, and more near,
Sound of song, and plash of oar,
From wild bays, and inlets hoar,
While above yon isles afar
Ghostlike sinks last night's last star?

CHANGES.

WHOM first we love, you know, we seldom wed.
Time rules us all. And Life, indeed, is not
The thing we planned it out ere hope was dead.
And then, we women cannot choose our lot.

Much must be borne which it is hard to bear:
Much given away which it were sweet to keep.
God help us all! who need, indeed His care.
And yet, I know, the Shepherd loves his sheep.

My little boy begins to babble now
Upon my knee his earliest infant prayer.
He has his father's eager eyes, I know.
And, they say too, his mother's sunny hair.

But when he sleeps and smiles upon my knee,
And I can feel his light breath come and go,
I think of one (Heaven help and pity me!)
Who loved me, and whom I loved, long ago.

Who might have been . . . ah, what I dare not think!
We all are changed. God judges for us best.
God help us do our duty, and not shrink,
And trust in heaven humbly for the rest.

But blame us women not, if some appear
Too cold at times; and some too gay and light.

Some griefs gnaw deep. Some woes are hard to bear.
Who knows the Past? and who can judge us right?

Ah, were we judged by what we might have been,
And not by what we are, too apt to fall!
My little child — he sleeps and smiles between
These thoughts and me. In heaven we shall know all!

JUDICIUM PARIDIS.

I SAID, when young, "Beauty's the supreme joy.
Her I will choose, and in all forms will face her;
Eye to eye, lip to lip, and so embrace her
With my whole heart." I said this being a boy.

"First, I will seek her — naked, or clad only
In her own god-head, as I know of yore
Great bards beheld her." So by sea and shore
I sought her, and among the mountains lonely.

"There be great sunsets in the wondrous West:
And marvel in the orbings of the moon;
And glory in the jubilees of June;
And power in the deep ocean. For the rest,

"Green-glaring glaciers; purple clouds of pine
White walls of ever-roaring cataracts;
Blue thunder drifting over thirsty tracts;
The homes of eagles; these, too, are divine,

"And terror shall not daunt me — so it be
Beautiful — or in storm or in eclipse:

Rocking pink shells, or wrecking freighted ships,
I shall not shrink to find her in the sea.

"Next, I will seek her — in all shapes of wood,
Or brass, or marble; or in colours clad;
And sensuous lines, to make my spirit glad.
And she shall change her dress with every mood.

"Rose-latticed casements, lone in summer lands—
Some witch's bower: pale sailors on the marg
Of magic seas, in an enchanted barge
Stranded, at sunset, upon jewell'd sands:

"White nymphs among the lilies: shepherd kings:
And pink-hoov'd Fawns: and moon'd Endymions:
From every channel thro' which Beauty runs
To fertilize the world with lovely things.

"I will draw freely, and be satisfied.
Also, all legends of her apparition
To men, in earliest times, in each condition,
I will inscribe on portraits of my bride.

"Then, that no single sense of her be wanting,
Music; and all voluptuous combinations
Of sound, with their melodious palpitations
To charm the ear, the cells of fancy haunting.

"And in her courts my life shall be outroll'd
As one unfurls some gorgeous tapestry,
Wrought o'er with old Olympian heraldry,
All purple-woven stiff with blazing gold.

"And I will choose no sight for tears to flow:
I will not look at sorrow: I will see
Nothing less fair and full of majesty
Than young Apollo leaning on his bow.

"And I will let things come and go: nor range
For knowledge: but from moments pluck delight:
The while the great days ope and shut in light,
And wax and wane about me, rich with change.

"Some cup of dim hills, where a white moon lies,
Dropt out of weary skies without a breath,
In a great pool: a slumb'rous vale beneath:
And blue damps prickling into white fire-flies:

"Some sunset vision of an Oread, less
Than half an hour ere moonrise caught asleep
With a flusht cheek, among crusht violets deep —
A warm half-glimpse of milk-white nakedness,

"On sumptuous summer eves: shall wake for me
Rapture from all the various stops of life;
Making it like some charm'd Arcadian fife
Fill'd by a wood-god with his ecstasy."

These things I said while I was yet a boy,
And the world show'd as between dream and waking
A man may see the face he loves. So, breaking
Silence, I cried . . . "Thou art the supreme Joy!"

My spirit, as a lark hid near the sun,
Caroll'd at morning. But ere she had dropt
Half down the rainbow-colour'd years that propp'd
Her gold cloud up, and broadly, one by one,

The world's great harvest-lands broke on her eye,
She changed her tone, . . . "What is it I may keep?

For look here, how the merry reapers reap:
Even children glean: and each puts something by.

"The pomps of morning pass: when evening comes,
What is retain'd of these which I may show?
If for the hills I leave the fields below
I fear to die an exile from men's homes.

"Tho' here I see the orient pageants pass,
I am not richer than the merest hind
That toils below, all day, among his kind,
And clinks at eve glad horns in the dry grass."

Then, pondering long, at length I made confession.
"I have err'd much, rejecting all that man did
For all my pains I shall go empty-handed:
And Beauty, of its nature foils possession."

Thereafter, I said . . . "Knowledge is most fair.
Surely to know is better than to see.
To see is loss: to know is gain: and we
Grow old. I will store thriftily, with care."

In which mood I endured for many years,
Valuing all things for their further uses:
And seeking knowledge at all open sluices:
Tho' oft the stream turn'd brakish with my tears.

Yet not the less, for years in this same mood
I rested: nor from any object turn'd
That had its secret to be spell'd and learn'd,
Murmuring ever "Knowledge is most good."

Unto which end I shunn'd the revelling
And ignorant crowd, that eat the fruits and die:
And call'd out Plato from his century
To be my helpmate: and made Homer sing.

Until the awful Past in gather'd heaps
  Weigh'd on my brain, and sunk into my soul,
  And sadden'd thro' my nature, till the whole
Of life was darken'd downward to the deeps.

And, wave on wave, the melancholy ages
  Crept o'er my spirit: and the years displaced
  The landmarks of the days: life waned, effaced
From action by the sorrows of the sages:

And my identity became at last
  The record of those others: or, if more,
  A hollow shell the sea sung in: a shore
Of footprints which the waves wash'd from it fast.

And all was as a dream whence, holding breath,
  It seem'd, at times, just possible to break
  By some wild nervous effort, with a shriek,
Into the real world of life and death.

But that thought saved me. Thro' the dark I scream'd
  Against the darkness, and the darkness broke,
  And broke that nightmare: back to life I woke,
Tho' weary with the dream which I had dream'd.

O life! life! life! With laughter and with tears
  I tried myself: I knew that I had need
  Of pain to prove that this was life indeed,
With its warm privilege of hopes and fears.

O Love of man made Life of man, that saves!
  O man, that standest looking on the light:
  That standest on the forces of the night:
That standest up between the stars and graves!

O man! by man's dread privilege of pain,
Dare not to scorn thine own soul nor thy brother's:
Tho' thou be more or less than all the others.
Man's life is all too sad for man's disdain.

The smiles of seraphs are less awful far
Than are the tears of this humanity,
That sound, in dropping, thro' Eternity,
Heard in God's ear beyond the furthest star.

If that be true — the hereditary hate
Of Love's lost Rebel, since the worlds began, —
The very Fiend, in hating, honours Man:
Flattering with Devil-homage Man's estate.

If two Eternities, at strife for us,
Around each human soul wage silent war,
Dare we disdain ourselves, tho' fall'n we are,
With Hell and Heaven looking on us thus?

Whom God hath loved, whom Devils dare not scorn,
Despise not thou — the meanest human creature.
Climb, if thou canst, the heights of thine own nature,
And look toward Paradise where each was born.

So I spread sackcloth on my former pride:
And sat down, clothed and cover'd up with shame:
And cried to God to take away my blame
Among my brethren: and to these I cried

To come between my crime and my despair,
That they might help my heart up, when God sent

Upon my soul its proper punishment,
Lest that should be too great for me to bear.

And so I made my choice: and learn'd to live
Again, and worship, as my spirit yearn'd:
So much had been admired — so much been learn'd —
So much been given me — O, how much to give!

Here is the choice, and now the time, O chooser!
Endless the consequence tho' brief the choice.
Echoes are waked down ages by thy voice:
Speak: and be thou the gainer or the loser.

And I bethought me long . . . "Tho' garners split,
If none but thou be fed art thou more full?"
For surely Knowledge and the Beautiful
Are human; must have love, or die for it!

To Give is better than to Know or See:
And both are means: and neither is the end:
Knowing and seeing, if none call thee friend,
Beauty and knowledge have done nought for thee.

Tho' I at Aphroditë all day long
Gaze until sunset with a thirsty eye,
I shall not drain her boundless beauty dry
By that wild gaze: nor do her fair face wrong.

For who gives, giving, doth win back his gift:
And knowledge by division grows to more:
Who hides the Master's talent shall die poor,
And starve at last of his own thankless thrift.

I did this for another: and, behold!
My work hath blood in it: but thine hath none:
Done for thyself, it dies in being done:
To wha thou buyest thou thyself art sold.

Give thyself utterly away. Be lost.
Choose some one, something: not thyself, thine own:
Thou canst not perish: but, thrice greater grown —
Thy gain the greatest where thy loss was most —

Thou in another shalt thyself new-find.
The single globule, lost in the wide sea,
Becomes an ocean. Each identity
Is greatest in the greatness of its kind.

Who serves for gain, a slave, by thankless pelf
Is paid: who gives himself is priceless, free.
I give myself, a man, to God: lo, He
Renders me back a saint unto myself!

NIGHT.

Come to me, not as once thou camest, Night!
With light and splendour up the gorgeous West;
Easing the heart's rich sense of thee with sighs
Sobb'd out of all emotion on Love's breast;
While the dark world waned wavering into rest,
Half seen athwart the dim delicious light
Of languid eyes:

But softly, soberly; and dark — more dark!
Till my life's shadow lose itself in thine.
Athwart the light of slowly-gathering tears.
That come between me and the starlight, shine
From distant melancholy deeps divine,
While day slips downward thro' a rosy arc
To other spheres.

SONG.

Flow, freshly flow,
Dark stream, below!
While stars grow light above:
By willowy banks, thro' lonely downs,
Past terraced walls in silent towns,
And bear me to my love!

Still, as we go,
Blow, gently blow,
Warm wind, and blithely move
These dreamy sails, that slowly glide —
A shadow on the shining tide
That bears me to my love.

Fade, sweetly fade
In dewy shade
On lonely grange and grove,
O lingering day! and bring the night
Thro' all her milk-white mazes bright
That tremble o'er my love.

The sunset wanes
From twinkling panes.
Dim, misty myriads move
Down glimmering streets. One light I see —
One happy light, that shines for me,
And lights me to my love!

FORBEARANCE.

Call me not, Love, unthankful, or unkind,
That I have left my heart with thee, and fled
I were not worth that wealth which I resign'd,
Had I not chosen poverty instead.

Grant me but solitude! I dare not swerve
From my soul's law — a slave, tho' serving thee.
I but forbear more grandly to deserve:
The free gift only cometh of the free.

HELIOS HYPERIONIDES.

Helios all day long his allotted labour pursues;
No rest to his passionate heart and his panting horses given,
From the moment when roseate-fingered Eos kindles the dews
And spurns the salt sea-floors, ascending silvery the heaven,
Until from the hand of Eos Hesperos, trembling, receives
His fragrant lamp, and faint in the twilight hangs it up.
Then the over-wearied son of Hyperion lightly leaves
His dusty chariot, and softly slips into his golden cup:
And to holy Æthiopia, under the ocean-stream,
Back from the sunken retreats of the sweet Hesperides,
Leaving his unloved labour, leaving his unyoked team,
He sails to his much loved wife; and stretches his limbs at ease
In a laurelled lawn divine, on a bed of beaten gold,
Where he pleasantly sleeps, forgetting his travel by lands and seas,
Till again the clear-eyed Eos comes with a finger cold,
And again, from his white wife sever'd, Hyperionides
Leaps into his flaming chariot, angrily gathers the reins,

Headlong flings his course thro' Uranos, much in wrath,
And over the seas and mountains, over the rivers and plains,
Chafed at heart, tumultuous, pushes his burning path.

ELISABETTA SIRANI.

1665.

JUST to begin, — and end! so much, — no more!
To touch upon the very point at last
Where life should cling: to feel the solid shore
Safe; where, the seething sea's strong toil o'erpast,
Peace seem'd appointed; then, with all the store
Half-undivulged of the glean'd ocean cast,
Like a discouraged wave's on the bleak strand,
Where what appear'd some temple (whose glad Priest
To gather ocean's sparkling gift should stand,
Bidding the wearied wave, from toil releast,
Sleep in the marble harbours bathed with bland
And quiet sunshine, flowing from full east
Among the laurels) proves the dull blind rock's
Fantastic front, — to die, a disallow'd,
Dasht purpose: which the scornful shore-cliff mocks,
Even as it sinks; and all its wealth bestow'd
n vain, — mere food to feed, perchance, stray flocks
Of the coarse sea-gull! weaving its own shroud
Of idle foam, swift ceasing to be seen!
—— Sad, sad, my father! . . . yet it comes to this.
For I am dying. All that might have been —
That must have been! . . . the days, so hard to miss,

So sure to come! . . . eyes, lips, that seem'd to lean
In on me at my work, and almost kiss
The curls bow'd o'er it, . . . lost! Oh, never doubt
I should have lived to know them all again,
And from the crowd of praisers single out
For special love those forms beheld so plain
Beforehand. When my pictures, borne about
Bologna, to the church doors, led their train
Of kindling faces, turn'd, as by they go,
Up to these windows, — standing at your side
Unseen, to see them, I (be sure!) should know
And welcome back those eyes and lips, descried
Long since in fancy: for I loved them so,
And so believed them! Think! . . . Bologna's pride
My paintings! . . . Guido Reni's mantle mine . . .
And I, the maiden artist, prized among
The masters, . . . ah, that dream was too divine
For earth to realize! I die so young,
All this escapes me! God, the gift be Thine,
Not man's then . . . better so! That throbbing throng
Of human faces fades out fast. Even yours,
Beloved ones, the inexorable Fate
(For all our vow'd affections!) scarce endures
About me. Must I go, then, desolate
Out from among you? Nay, my work ensures
Fit guerdon somewhere, — tho' the gift must wait!
Had I lived longer, life would sure have set
Earth's gift of fame in safety. But I die.
Death must make safe the heavenly guerdon yet.
I trusted time for immortality, —
There was my error! Father, never let
Doubt of reward confuse my memory!
Besides, — I have done much: and what is done
Is well done. All my heart conceived, my hand
Made fast . . . mild martyr, saint, and weeping nun,

And truncheon'd prince, and warrior with bold brand,
Yet keep my life upon them; — as the sun,
Tho' fallen below the limits of the land,
Still sees on every form of purple cloud
His painted presence.

Flaring August's here,
September's coming! Summer's broider'd shroud
Is borne away in triumph by the year:
Red Autumn drops, from all his branches bow'd,
His careless wealth upon the costly bier.
We must be cheerful. Set the casement wide.
One last look o'er the places I have loved,
One last long look! . . . Bologna, O my pride
Among thy palaced streets! The days have moved
Pleasantly o'er us. What has been denied
To our endeavour? Life goes unreproved.
To make the best of all things, is the best
Of all means to be happy. This I know,
But cannot phrase it finely. The night's rest
The day's toil sweetens. Flowers are warm'd by snow.
All's well God wills. Work out this grief. Joy's zest
Itself is salted with a touch of woe.
There's nothing comes to us may not be borne,
Except a too great happiness. But this
Comes rarely. Tho' I know that you will mourn
The little maiden helpmate you must miss,
Thanks be to God, I leave you not forlorn.
There should be comfort in this dying kiss.
Let Barbara keep my colours for herself.
I'm sorry that Lucia went away
In some unkindness. 'Twas a cheerful elf!
Send her my scarlet ribands, mother; say
I thought of her. My palette's on the shelf,
Surprised, no doubt, at such long holiday

In the south window, on the easel, stands
My picture for the Empress Eleänore,
Still wanting some few touches, these weak hands
Must leave to others. Yet there's time before
The year ends. And the Empress' own commands
You'll find in writing. Barbara's brush is more
Like mine than Anna's; let her finish it.
Oh, . . . and there's 'Maso our poor fisherman!
You'll find my work done for him: something fit
To hang among his nets: you liked the plan
My fancy took to please our friend's dull wit,
Scarce brighter than his old tin fishing can. . . .
St. Margaret, stately as a ship full sail,
Leading a dragon by an azure band;
The ribbon flutters gayly in the gale:
The monster follows the Saint's guiding hand,
Wrinkled to one grim smile from head to tail:
For in his horny hide his heart grows bland.
—— Where are you, dear ones? . . .

'Tis the dull, faint chill,
Which soon will shrivel into burning pain!
Dear brother, sisters, father, mother — still
Stand near me! While your faces fixt remain
Within my sense, vague fears of unknown ill
Are softly crowded out, . . . and yet, 'tis vain!
Greet Giulio Banzi; greet Antonio; greet
Bartolomeo, kindly. When I'm gone,
And in the school-room, as of old, you meet,
— Ah, yes! you'll miss a certain merry tone,
A cheerful face, a smile that should complete
The vague place in the household picture grown
To an aspect so familiar, it seems strange
That aught should alter there. Mere life, at least,
Could not have brought the shadow of a change
Across it. Safely the warm years encreast
Among us. I have never sought to range
From our small table at earth's general feast,

To higher places: never loved but you,
Dear family of friends, except my art:
Nor any form save those my pencil drew
E'er quiver'd in the quiet of my heart.
I die a maiden to Madonna true,
And would have so continued.... There, the smart,
The pang, the faintness!...

Ever, as I lie
Here, with the Autumn sunset on my face,
And heavy in my curls (whilst it, and I,
Together, slipping softly from the place
We play'd in, pensively prepare to die),
A low warm humming simmers in my ears,
— Old summer afternoons! faint fragments rise
Out of my broken life ... at times appears
Madonna-like a moon in mellow skies:
The three Fates with the spindle and the shears.
The Grand Duke Cosmo with the Destinies:
St. Margaret with her dragon: fitful cheers
Along the Via Urbana come and go:
Bologna with her towers!... Then all grows dim,
And shapes itself anew, softly and slow,
To cloister'd glooms thro' which the silver hymn
Eludes the sensitive silence; whilst below
The south-west window, just one single, slim,
And sleepy sunbeam, powders with waved gold
A lane of gleamy mist along the gloom,
Whereby to find its way, thro' manifold
Magnificence, to Guido Reni's tomb,
Which set in steadfast splendour, I behold.
And all the while, I scent the incense fume,
Till dizzy grows the brain, and dark the eye
Beneath the eyelid. When the end is come,
There, by his tomb (our master's) let me lie,
Somewhere, not too far off; beneath the dome
Of our own Lady of the Rosary:
Safe, where old friends will pass; and still near home!

LAST WORDS.

WILL, are you sitting and watching there yet?
And I know, by a certain skill
That grows out of utter wakefulness, the night must be far spent, Will:
For, lying awake so many a night, I have learn'd at last to catch
From the crowing cock, and the clanging clock and the sound of the beating watch,
A misty sense of the measureless march of Time, as he passes here,
Leaving my life behind him; and I know that the dawn is near.
But you have been watching three nights, Will, and you look'd so wan to-night,
I thought, as I saw you sitting there, in the sad monotonous light
Of the moody night-lamp near you, that I could not choose but close
My lids as fast, and lie as still, as tho' I lay in a doze:
For, I thought, "He will deem I am dreaming, and then he may steal away,
And sleep a little: and this will be well." And truly, I dream'd, as I lay
Wide awake, but all as quiet, as tho', the last office done,
They had streak'd me out for the grave, Will, to which they will bear me anon.
Dream'd; for old things and places came dancing about my brain,
Like ghosts that dance in an empty house: and my thoughts went slipping again
By green back-ways forgotten to a stiller circle of time,
Where violets, faded forever, seem'd blowing at once in their prime:

And I fancied that you and I, Will, were boys
again as of old,
At dawn on the hill-top together, at eve in the
field by the fold;
Till the thought of this was growing too wildly
sweet to be borne,
And I op'd my eyes, and turn'd me round, and
there, in the light forlorn,
I find you sitting beside me. But the dawn is at
hand, I know.
Sleep a little. I shall not die to-night. You
may leave me. Go.
Eh! is it time for the drink? must you mix it? it
does me no good.
But thanks, old friend, true friend! I would live
for your sake, if I could.
Ay, there are some good things in life, that fall
not away with the rest.
And, of all best things upon earth, I hold that a
faithful friend is the best.
For woman, Will, is a thorny flower: it breaks,
and we bleed and smart:
The blossom falls at the fairest, and the thorn
runs into the heart.
And woman's love is a bitter fruit; and, however
he bite it, or sip,
There's many a man has lived to curse the taste
of that fruit on his lip.
But never was any man yet, as I ween, be he
whosoever he may,
That has known what a true friend is, Will, and
wish'd that knowledge away.
You were proud of my promise, faithful despite
of my fall,
Sad when the world seem'd over sweet, sweet
when the world turn'd gall:
When I cloak'd myself in the pride of praise
from what God grieved to see,
You saw thro' the glittering lie of it all, and si-
lently mourn'd for me:

When the world took back what the world had
given, and scorn with praise chang'd
place,
I, from my sackcloth and ashes, look'd up, and
saw hope glow on your face:
Therefore, fair weather be yours, Will, whether
it shines or pours,
And, if I can slip from out of my grave, my spirit
will visit yours.

O woman eyes that have smiled and smiled, O
woman lips that have kist
The life-blood out of my heart, why thus forever
do you persist,
Pressing out of the dark all round, to bewilder
my dying hours
With your ghostly sorceries brew'd from the
breath of your poison flowers?
Still, tho' the idol be broken, I see at their an-
cient revels,
The riven altar around, come dancing the self-
same devils.
Lente currite, lente currite, noctis equi!
Linger a little, O Time, and let me be saved ere
I die.
How many a night 'neath her window have I
walk'd in the wind and rain,
Only to look at her shadow fleet over the lighted
pane.
Alas! 'twas the shadow that rested, 'twas herself
that fleeted, you see,
And now I am dying, I know it:—dying, and
where is she!
Dancing divinely, perchance, or, over her soft
harp strings,
Using the past to give pathos to the little new
song that she sings.
Bitter? I dare not be bitter in the few last hours
left to live.

Needing so much forgiveness, God grant me at least to forgive.
There can be no space for the ghost of her face down in the narrow room,
And the mole is blind, and the worm is mute, and there must be rest in the tomb.
And just one failure more or less to a life that seems to be
(Whilst I lie looking upon it, as a bird on the broken tree
She hovers about, ere making wing for a land of lovelier growth,
Brighter blossom, and purer air, somewhere far off in the south,)
Failure, crowning failure, failure from end to end,
Just one more or less, what matter, to the many no grief can mend?
Not to know vice is virtue, not fate, however men rave:
And, next to this I hold that man to be but a coward and slave
Who bears the plague-spot about him, and, knowing it, shrinks or fears
To brand it out, tho' the burning knife should hiss in his heart's hot tears.
But I have caught the contagion of a world that I never loved,
Pleased myself with approval of those that I never approved,
Palter'd with pleasures that pleased not, and fame where no fame could be,
And how shall I look, do you think, Will, when the angels are looking on me?
Yet oh! the confident spirit once mine, to dare and to do!
Take the world into my hand, and shape it, and make it anew:
Gather all men in my purpose, men in their darkness and dearth,

Men in their meanness and misery, made of the dust of the earth,
Mould them afresh, and make out of them Man, with his spirit sublime,
Man, the great heir of Eternity, dragging the conquests of Time!
Therefore I mingled among them, deeming the poet should hold
All natures saved in his own, as the world in the ark was of old;
All natures saved in his own to be types of a nobler race,
When the old world passeth away and the new world taketh his place. [worm,
Triple fool in my folly! purblind and impotent
Thinking to move the world, who could not myself stand firm!
Cheat of a worn-out trick, as one that on shipboard roves
Wherever the wind may blow, still deeming the continent moves!
Blowing the frothy bubble of life's brittle purpose away;
Child, ever chasing the morrow, who now cannot ransom a day:
Still I call'd Fame to lead onward, forgetting she follows behind
Those who know whither they walk thro' the praise or dispraise of mankind.
All my life (looking back on it) shows like the broken stair
That winds round a ruin'd tower, and never will lead anywhere.
Friend, lay your hand in my own, and swear to me, when you have seen
My body borne out from the door, ere the grass on my grave shall be green,
You will burn every book I have written. And so perish, one and all,

Each trace of the struggle that fail'd with the
life that I cannot recall.
Dust and ashes, earth's dross, which the mattock
may give to the mole!
Something, tho' stain'd and defaced, survives, as
I trust, with the soul.

Something? . . . Ay, something comes back to
me . . . Think! that I might have been . . .
what?
Almost, I fancy at times, what I meant to have
been, and am not.
Where was the fault? Was it strength fell short?
And yet (I can speak of it now)
How my spirit sung like the resonant nerve of a
warrior's battle bow
When the shaft has leapt from the string,
what time, her first bright banner un-
furl'd,
Song aim'd her arrowy purpose in me sharp at
the heart of the world.
Was it the hand that falter'd, unskill'd? or was
it the eye that deceived?
However I reason it out, there remains a failure
time has not retrieved.
I said I would live in all lives that beat, and love
in all loves that be:
I would crown me lord of all passions; and the
passions were lords of me.
I would compass every circle, I would enter at
every door,
In the starry spiral of science, and the labyrinth
of lore,
Only to follow the flying foot of love to his last
retreat.
Fool! that with man's all-imperfect would cir-
cumscribe God's all-complete!
Arrogant error! whereby I starved like the fool
in the fable of old,

Whom the gods destroyed by the gift he craved, turning all things to gold.
Be wise: know what to leave unknown. The flowers bloom on the brink,
But black death lurks at the bottom. Help men to enjoy, not to think,
O poet to whom I give place! cull the latest effect, leave the cause.
Few that dive for the pearl of the deep but are crush'd in the kraken's jaws.
While the harp of Arion is heard at eve over the glimmering ocean:
He floats in the foam, on the dolphin's back, gliding with gentle motion,
Over the rolling water, under the light of the beaming star,
And the nymphs, half asleep on the surface, sail moving his musical car.
A little knowledge will turn youth gray. And I stood, chill in the sun,
Naming you each of the roses; blest by the beauty of none.
My song had an after-savour of the salt of many tears,
Or it burn'd with a bitter foretaste of the end as it now appears:
And the world that had paused to listen awhile, because the first notes were gay,
Pass'd on its way with a sneer and a smile: "Has he nothing fresher to say?
This poet's mind was a weedy flower that presently comes to nought!"
For the world was not so sad but what my song was sadder, it thought.
Comfort me not. For if aught be worse than failure from over-stress
Of a life's prime purpose, it is to sit down content with a little success.
Talk not of genius baffled. Genius is master of man.

Genius does what it must, and talent does what
it can.
Blot out my name, that the spirits of Shakespeare
and Milton and Burns
Look not down on the praises of fools with a pity
my soul yet spurns.
And yet, had I only the trick of an aptitude
shrewd of its kind,
I should have lived longer, I think, more merry of
heart and of mind.
Surely I knew (who better?) the innermost se-
cret of each
Bird, and beast, and flower. Failed I to give to
them speech?
All the pale spirits of storm, that sail down
streams of the wind,
Cleaving the thunder-cloud, with wild hair blow-
ing behind;
All the soft seraphs that float in the light of the
crimson eve,
When Hesper begins to glitter, and the heavy
woodland to heave:
All the white nymphs of the water that dwell 'mid
the lilies alone:
And the buskin'd maids for the love of whom the
hoary oak-trees groan;
They came to my call in the forest; they crept to
my feet from the river:
They softly look'd out of the sky when I sung,
and their wings beat with breathless en
deavour
The blocks of the broken thunder piling their
stormy lattices,
Over the moaning mountain walls, and over the
sobbing seas.
So many more reproachful faces around my
bed!
Voices moaning about me: "Ah! couldst thou
not heed what we said?"

Peace to the past! it skills not now: these
thoughts that vex it in vain
Are but the dust of a broken purpose blowing
about the brain
Which presently will be tenantless, when the
wanton worms carouse,
And the mole builds over my bones his little win-
dowless house.
It is growing darker and stranger, Will, and
colder — dark and cold,
Dark and cold! Is the lamp gone out? Give me
thy hand to hold.
No: 'tis life's brief candle burning down. Tears?
tears, Will! Why,
This which we call dying is only ceasing to die.
It is but the giving over a game all lose. Fear
life, not death.
The hard thing was to live, Will. To whatever
bourne this breath
Is going, the way is easy now. With flowers and
music, life,
Like a pagan sacrifice, leads us along to this dark
High Priest with the knife.
I have been too peevish at mere mischance. For
whether we build it, friend,
Of brick or jasper, life's large base dwindles into
this point at the end,
A kind of nothing! Who knows whether 'tis
fittest to weep or laugh
At those thin curtains the spider spins o'er each
dusty epitaph?
I talk wildly. But this I know, that not even the
best and first,
When all is done, can claim by desert what even
to the last and worst
Of us weak workmen, God from the depth of his
infinite mercy giveth.
These bones shall rest in peace, for I know that
my Redeemer liveth.

Doubtful images come and go; and I seem to be
passing them by.
Bubbles these be of the mind, which show that
the stream is hurrying nigh
To the home of waters. Already I feel, in a sort
of still sweet awe,
The great main current of all that I am begin-
ning to draw and draw
Into perfect peace. I attain at last! Life's a long,
long reaching out
Of the soul to something beyond her. Now comes
the end of all doubt.
The vanishing point in the picture! I have ut-
ter'd weak words to-night,
And foolish. A thousand failures, what are these
in the sight
Of the One All-Perfect who, whether man fails
in his work, or succeeds,
Builds surely, solemnly up from our broken days
and deeds
The infinite purpose of time. We are but day
labourers all,
Early or late, or first or last at the gate in the
vineyard wall.
Lord! if, in love, tho' fainting oft, I have tended
thy gracious Vine,
Oh! quench the thirst on these dying lips, Thou
who pourest the wine.
Hush! I am in the way to study a long, long
silence now.
I know at last what I cannot tell: I see what I
may not shew.
Pray awhile for my soul. Then sleep. There is
nothing in this to fear.
I shall sleep into death. Night sleeps. The hoarse
wolf howls not near,
No dull owl beats the casement, and no rough-
bearded star

Stares on my mild departure from yon dark win
dow bar.
Nature takes no notice of those that are coming
or going.
To-morrow make ready my grave, Will. To-mor
row new flowers will be blowing.

To

CHAUNCY HARE TOWNSHEND

IN MEMORY OF DAYS ON LEMAN,

DAYS BY HIM ENDEARED TO MEMORY,

This Book

IS

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

INTRODUCTION.

IN the following Poems no attempt has been made at accurate verbal translation from the original language. They cannot, indeed, be called translations in the strict sense of the word. What they are, let the reader decide. What they are meant to be, is nothing more than a rude medium through which to convey to other minds something of the impression made upon my own by the poetry of a people amongst whom literature is yet unborn; who in the nineteenth century retain, with the traditions, many also of the habits and customs, of a barbarous age; and whose social life represents the struggle of centuries to maintain, under the code of Mahomet, the creed of Christ. It is indeed this strange intermixture of Mahometan with Christian association which gives to the poetry of the Serbs its most striking characteristic. It is the sword of a Crusader in the scabbard of a Turk. That, however, which mainly distinguishes this from all other contemporary poetry with which I am acquainted, is the evidence borne on the face of it of an origin, not in the heads of a few, but in the hearts of all. This is a poetry of which the People is the Poet. The "People," not as representing, in contradistinction to all other constituent parts of a community, that class which lies broadly at the basis of a civilization culminating through many social

anks and orders in a high degree of refinement but "the People," as expressive of one great nationality, which, however geographically subdivided, is yet in that rude and elementary social condition which consists but of a single class, and admits but one aspect of life, one mode of thought, one series of sensations, one train of association. And as is the people, so is the poetry. It is inferior to the poetry of the Persians inasmuch as it is less intellectual, has less fancy less wisdom, less art. It is destitute of whatever indicates individual thought or personal observation of life. It has nothing of the graceful fancy which glitters through the Gulistan, and never rises to such sweet and noble tones as those which render harmonious some portions of the Shah Nameh. Here we shall find no trace of that gracious chivalry which Ferdausi, perhaps, bequeathed to Ariosto, and assuredly none of that shrewd and somewhat sad experience of mankind which followed, among the roses of his immortal Garden, Sadi, "the wanderer of the world." But such merits are perhaps incompatible with the poetry in what, of the Serbs, is most remarkable,— I mean, that spontaneity and unity, that evidence of collective inspiration, which has never survived the childhood of a people. Such flowers as grow here may be merely mountain weeds, but the dew of the morning is on them.

There is a period in the early life of every people, before man has been divided into men, when the many are still the one. Special and particular sources of interest are as yet neither sought nor discovered. Popular sympathy exists only for subjects of general history or universal experience; and in regard to these all men feel the same feeling and think the same thought. The individual mind lies yet unformed in the matrix of the general life, and the only indi-

vidual is the Race. Even the gods belong to it. Whoever, then, is the first to speak aloud has the advantage of speaking for all. He expresses not only his own, but every man's sensations and experience. It follows that there is between the fact and the word a directness, closeness, and simplicity of connection which cannot afterwards be realized. For, of all things in nature, the first description is likely to be the best, because it is the most obvious, and therefore the most generally true. The earth is black, the grass is green, the heaven is high, the sea is deep. To say more about them is, in reality, to say less of them. For, as we cannot extend or vary the Universal, every word added to that which expresses the permanent and general quality of a thing can only relate to what is partial and particular; and, therefore, less valuable. But so inherent to the thing spoken of is the attribute first selected to qualify it, that by the process of universal usage the epithet is soon absorbed back into the noun. The words "deep sea" and "black earth" imperceptibly cease to express anything more than "the sea" and "the earth;" and the modern poet, in order to refresh the sense of perception, is constrained to designate these things anew by some epithet which, in proportion as it is original, expresses only a limited and special experience. It is this primitive *universality* which gives to the poetry of the Serbs its freshness and its force. Adopting a word now generally admitted into our vocabulary from th German, I would describe it as especially "ob jective." The smallest Servian song is therefore rather dramatic than lyrical. For the lyrical poet necessarily expresses a subjective state of mind, and the shallow critic who accuses him of egotism is simply accusing him of being a lyric poet.

It is so impossible to separate the Servian poetry from the Servian people, and so difficult to form any judgment of the former without reference to the latter, that I entreat the reader's sufferance to say a few words about the Serbs, preliminary to his perusal of this attempted reproduction of some of their songs. Those who edit other men's poems are wont to affix to the poetry an introductory notice of the author. I claim a very brief use of this privilege; for the Servian people is the author of the Servian poetry.

This people, a branch of the old Slavonic family, descended in the seventh century from the Krapak mountains, and established themselves, under permission of the Emperor Heracleus, in Mesia Superiora. Until 923, Servia formed a small state, with its kings and history but little known. At that epoch it was conquered by the Bulgarians, and soon passed, with them, under the dominion of the Greek emperors. In the twelfth century, the Serbs, taking advantage of the weakness of the Lower Empire, rendered themselves independent under Tchoudomil, and founded an empire which, in the fourteenth century, became very powerful under Douchan the Magnanimous, who assumed the title of tzar or emperor.

This empire included a portion of Thrace and Macedonia, and many towns in Thessaly and Albania. Under the reign of Ouroch the First the power of it declined; and at the battle of Kossovo (15th June, 1389), Lazarus, the last Servian Knès, was destroyed, with his army, by the Sultan Amurath the First. After this fatal day Servia ceased to be a nation. The name of it was effaced from the map of Europe, and the country portioned out into various pachaliks, of which the principal was that of Belgrade, then called the Sandgaciat of Semendria. From this epoch the Serbs remained for four hundred years

victims of an oppression so unspeakably bitter that it would be difficult to convey to the mind of a modern European any idea of the intolerable nature of it. Thus subjected to a domination brutal and sanguinary in the extreme, at a period when, throughout Europe, arts, letters, and commerce were on the decline, the people soon lost every vestige of an imperfect civilization. From discouragement they sunk into degradation; the degradation of a people which has ceased to hope. To escape as much as might be from the sight of their oppressors, they abandoned their towns, and dwelt concealed among the woods and mountains, where they bred and tended swine.

At this day the results of prolonged oppression are unhappily to be traced throughout Servia in all that debases the character, and contracts the self-development of a people. That universal worship of the lie which is the creed of the slave, that predisposition to frantic ferocity which is the reaction from suppressed and impotent hatred — insincerity and servility, cunning and cruelty — these are at once the defects of the Servian character, and the results of the Turkish rule. The demoralization of the people is sadly to be seen in their poetry. It extols, as a public virtue, treachery to the public foe, mistakes trickery for strategy, falsehood for finesse, cruelty for valour and admits into the character of a hero every vice save that of physical cowardice.

In the war declared by Josef II. against the Porte, the Serbs took arms with the Austrians. Accustomed, during that brief period, to the enjoyment of comparative independence, they resolved, after the peace of Sistov, not lightly to part with the blessing of it. About a tenth part of the population withdrew armed, in little bands, into their forests and mountains. These

little armed companies, leading amongst their natural mountain fastnesses a marauding migratory life, partly of a predatory, partly of a political character, called themselves Haidouks, or Bandits; and form a social phenomenon not very dissimilar to that represented by the banditti of Marco Sciarra in the forests around mediæval Rome. It is but a very few years since the Haidouk has ceased to be a prominent social feature in Servia. He is a principal personage in the poetry of the people, and Monsieur Dozon to whose able and interesting little work upon the poetry of the Serbs I am largely indebted,* relates that he was informed by a late Minister of the Interior in Servia, that in certain portions of the principality it had been found necessary to prohibit the recitation of the popular songs about the Haidouks, as numbers of those who listened to them had been incited to adopt the lawless life therein described.

The revolt of the Serbs under Kara-George (or Black George), and the disastrous result of it, are well known. It was reserved for the present Prince of Servia, Milosch Obrenovitch, to achieve the administrative independence of the Principality.†

The Servian Pesmas, which are the work of centuries, and which, more than anything else perhaps, have served to keep alive in the people the sentiment of nationality, and to unite in a common animosity to the Turk all the kindred branches of the great Slave race in the East—

* Those who may feel interested to know more of the heroic *pesmas*, will find in this work a faithful though slightly abbreviated prose translation of them, together with an excellent criticism on the poetry of the Serbs, from which I have herein adopted many statements entirely confirmed by my own experience in the country.

† Since these words were written, that extraordinary man has terminated a life perhaps unparalleled both in the duration, and the activity, of it. He is succeeded by his son Prince Michael.

may, all of them, be said to be lyrical, in so far as they are all of them made to be sung or recited to the *gouslé*, a rude musical instrument, with a single string, played on by a bow. But I have already observed that none of them possess those qualities which belong to what we now call lyric poetry. They may be classified under two heads — the heroic pesmas, relating to historical events and characters; and the domestic, or songs sung by the women — of an erotic or fantastic character. Of the former, I have given but a single specimen: that which relates to the battle of Kossovo, an event which was to the Serbs what the battle of Ceuta was to the Spaniards, of Hastings to the Saxons, and of Mohacs to the Magyars; for I must avow that the greater number of these heroic *pesmas* abound in the description of atrocities which would be sickening to an English reader. They are, however (some of them), so deeply tinctured with a kind of terror unlike that suggested by any poetry which is known to me, that I greatly regret having been unable to reproduce them in some form which, whilst excluding revolting details, might have still preserved the inspiration of terror.

It is but a very few years since the poetry of the Serbs was first reduced to writing. I believe that M. Vouk Stefanovitch Karadjitch was the first to rescue these *pesmas* from that state of oral tradition in which they had existed for ages. Like the Greek rhapsodies, they are composed and sung about the land, from village to village, by blind beggars. The poets of Servia are the blind; and surely there is something touching in this common consecration of the imaginary world as an hereditary possession to those from whose sense this visible world is darkened. The traveller, or the huntsman reposing from the chase, in some wild wayside

méhana or tavern (a mere mud cabin on the windy mountain side, and generally near a mountain spring), as, followed by his dogs, he seats himself upon the bench by the ingle, may yet see, amid a group of eager weather-beaten faces, the blind bard with his hollow, wooden *gouslé*, covered with sheepskin, and traversed by a single string. This instrument is placed upon the knee, and played like a violoncello. First a series of long wailing notes commands the attention of the audience; then a pause, through which you hear the harsh grating of the *gouslé* string; and then forth roll the long monotonous verses of the pesma, of which Marko Kralievitch is probably the hero; a sort of burly brawling Viking of the land, with just a touch in his composition of Roland and the Cid, but with much more about him of Gargantua.

I have already noticed the primitive simplicity of the Servian Pesmas. Amongst other causes, two chiefly have no doubt combined to preserve this in its original purity — one, the mountain life, and the social isolation which has for centuries withdrawn the Serbs from the influence of any foreign history, religion, or mythology;* and the other, the fact that the Turk, unlike European conquerors, has ever contented himself with superimposing on the conquered the authority of Islam, without any attempt to assimilate to himself the annexed population, either as regards language or legislation.

Another fact remains to be noticed in connection with the poetry of the Serbs. This is the almost entire absence of the mythic element. Nothing like the mysticism of the early Teutonic

*It is indeed singular that, considering the relations once existing between Montenegro and the Republics of Venice and Ragusa, the national poetry of these mountaineers should have been so little influenced from abroad.

literature, the fairy fantasies of the Persian, or the weird cosmogony of the Scandinavian Eddas, is to be found in these *pesmas*. This, I suppose, must be attributed to the character of the Slavonic race. Neither is any trace to be found in their poetry of superstitions which are to this day dominant amongst the people themselves, such as the vampire and the witch. One striking exception, however, to this general rejection of the mystical exists in the frequent introduction of the *vila* as a supernatural agent. Here is, perhaps, the fragment of an unconjectured myth. These strange and solemn beings, whose vague and varying forms have not yet been defined, even by the imagination, — rarely seen, but often making heard, from the mountain and the wild, their voice of prophecy and of warning, — menacing and sometimes deadly to man when he invades their mighty solitudes, yet gifted with beneficent powers and healing arts, are they not, perhaps, symbols of forces, at once terrible and salutary in nature, apparitions of her power, and echoes of her awful voice?

Of the domestic *pesmas* I have given many specimens, and yet barely enough to indicate their vast variety. The sentiment of love as expressed in these songs is not (it will be remarked) that tender metaphysical motion of the soul which belongs to the North, and is perhaps the growth of a high civilization. It is rather fierce, quick, meridional passion, the eager, instinctive, *mi piace* of the South, sensual but natural, and not without grace and delicacy.

What is most remarkable in these songs is their essentially dramatic character. Either they represent, in short close dialogue, a particular "situation," or they treat a particular phase of a particular sentiment or passion; or else they relate in rapid narrative a particular event, com

mencing, without preamble, where the action commences, and terminating, without reflection or remark, where the action terminates. Another peculiarity is a certain playful slyness, which hardly amounts to humour, but is like the sport of an infant savage. They also abound in what appears, if I may say so, a sort of *naïve* cynicism — the cynicism, not of embittered experience, but of childish incapacity for deep or earnest thought. The propensity to personify all things, and the familiar intercourse indicated in these pesmas, as existing between man and all natural objects, whether animate or inanimate, affords obvious proof of those primitive conditions of society to which I have already alluded.

The Servian metres are unrhymed, and trochaic or dactyllic in character. They consist of verses varying from three to seventeen syllables in length. Here is a specimen —

Oblăk sĕ vīyĕ | pōvĕdrŏm nēbŭ.

"*The cloud floats in the pure ether.*"

It is an interesting and suggestive fact that the natural quantity of the syllables is modified, in poetry, to suit the necessities of the metre. The following words, for instance, if pronounced without reference to prosody, would be thus accentuated —

I pōnēsĕ | trī trōvĕră blāgă.

But when sung to the *gouslé* as a verse, they are to be scanned thus —

I pŏnēsĕ | trī trŏvāră blāgă.

May not this throw a ray of light on the unelucidated question of Greek accent and quantity?

But I have said enough. I will only add of the contents of this little volume that, whether they be weeds or wild flowers, I have at least gathered them on their native soil, amidst the solitudes of the Carpathians, and along the shores of the Danube.

THE BATTLE OF KOSSOVO.

HEROIC PESMA.

SERBSKI PESME.

THE BATTLE OF KOSSOVO.*

I.

THE Sultan Murad o'er Kossovo comes
With banners and drums.

There, all in characters fair, (*a*)
He wrote a letter; and there
Bade his estaffettes despatch
To bear it to Krouchevatch,
To the white-wall'd town of the Tzar,
To the hands of Prince Lazar.

"Listen, Lazarus, (*b*) chief of the Serbs, to me!
That which never hath been, that which never shall be,
Is that two lords one land should sway,
And the same rayas two tributes pay.
Send to me, therefore, the tributes and keys;
The golden keys of each white town;
And send me a seven years' tribute with these.
But if this thou wilt not do,
Then come thou down over Kossovo:
On the field of Kossovo come thou down,
That we may divide the land with our swords.
These are my words."

When Lazarus this letter had read,
Bitter, bitter were the tears he shed.

* *See* Introduction.

II.

A gray bird, a falcon, comes flying apace
From Jerusalem, from the Holy Place;
And he bears a light swallow abroad.
It is not a gray bird, a falcon, God wot!
But the Saint Elias; and it is not
A light swallow he bears from afar,
But a letter from the Mother of God
To the Tzar who in Kossovo stays.
And the letter is dropt on the knees of the Tzar
And these are the words that it says: —

"Lazarus, Prince of a race that I love,
Which empire choosest thou?
That of the heaven above?
Or that of the earth below?
If thou choose thee an earthly realm,
Saddle horse, belt, spur, and away!
Warriors, bind ye both sabre and helm,
And rush on the Turks, and they
With their army whole shall perish.
But, if rather a heavenly crown thou cherish,
At Kossovo build ye a temple fair.
There no foundations of marble lay,
But only silk of the scarlet dye.
Range ye the army in battle array,
And let each and all full solemnly
Partake of the blesséd sacrament there.
For then of a certainty know
Ye shall utterly perish, both thou,
And thine army all; and the Turk shall be
Lord of the land that is under thee."

When the Tzar he read these words,
His thoughts were as long and as sharp as swords.
"God of my fathers, what shall I choose?
If a heavenly empire, then must I lose

All that is dearest to me upon earth;
But if that the heavenly here I refuse,
What then is the earthly worth?
It is but a day,
It passeth away,
And the glory of earth full soon is o'er,
And the glory of God is more and more."

"What is this world's renown?"
(His heart was heavy, his soul was stirr'd.)
"Shall an earthly empire be preferr'd
To an everlasting crown?
At Kossovo build me a temple fair:
Lay no foundations of marble down,
But only silk of the scarlet dye."
Then he sent for the Servian Patriarch:
With him twelve bishops to Kossovo went.
It was at the lifting of the dark:
They ranged the army in battle array,
And the army all full solemnly
Received the blessed sacrament,
And hardly was this done, when lo!
The Turks came rushing on Kossovo.

III.

Ivan Kossantchitch, my pobratime, (*c*)
What of the Turk? How deem ye of him?
Is he strong, is he many, is he near?
Our battle, say! may we show him?
May we hope to overthrow him?
What news of him bringest thou here?

And Ivan Kossantchitch replied:
"Milosch Obilitch, my brother dear,
I have lookt on the Turk in his pride.
He is strong, he is many, he is near,

His tents are on every side.
Were we all of us hewn into morsels, and salted,
Hardly, I think, should we salt him his meat.
Two whole days have I journeyed, nor halted,
Toward the Turk, near the Turk, round him, and never
Could I number his numbers, or measure his end.
From Eràble to Sazlia, brother, my feet
Have wander'd; from Sazlia round by the river,
Where the river comes round to the bridge with a bend;
And over the bridge to the town of Zvétchan;
From Zvétchan to Tchéchan, and further, and ever
Further, and over the mountains, wherever
Foot may fall, or eye may scan,
I saw nought but the Mussulman.

"Eastward and westward, and southward and nor'ward,
Scaling the hillside, and scathing the gorse,
Horseman to horseman, and horse against horse
Lances like forests when forests are black;
Standards like clouds flying backward and forward,
White tents like snowdrifts piled up at the back.
The rain may, in torrents, fall down out of heaven, (*d*)
But never the earth will it reach:
Nothing but horsemen, nothing but horses,
Thick as the sands which the wild river courses
Leave, after tempest, in heaps on the beach.
Murad, for pasture, hath given
To his horsemen the plain of Mazguite.
Lances a-ripple all over the land,
Tost like the bearded and billowy wheat
By the winds of the mountain driven
Under the mountain slab.

Murad looks down in command
Over Sitnitza and Lab."

"Answer me, Ivan, answer ye me,
Where may the tent of Murad be?
His milk-white tent, may one see it afar
O'er the plain, from the mountain, or out of the wood?
For I have sworn to the Prince Lazar
A solemn vow upon Holy Rood,
To bring him the head of the Turkish Tzar,
And set my feet in his infidel blood."

"Art mad, my pobratime, art mad?
Where may the tent be, the tent of Murad?
In the midst of a million eyes and ears:
In the midst of a million swords and spears,
In the heart of the camp of the Turk.
Fatal thy vow is, and wild is the work;
For hadst thou the wings of the falcon, to fly
Fleeter than lightning, along the deep sky,
The wings of the falcon, though fleet be they,
Would never bear thee thy body away."

And Milosch abjured him: "O Ivan, my brother,
(Tho' not by the blood, yet more dear than all other,)
See thou say nothing of this to our lord,
Lest ye sorrow his heart; and say never a word,
Lest our friends be afflicted, and fail. But thou
Shalt rather answer to who would know,
And boldly aver to the Tzar,
The Turk is many, but more are we,
And easy and light is the victory:
For he is not an army of men of war,
But a rabble rather
Of rascals that gather
To the promise of plunder from places afar;
Priests and pedlars,

Jugglers and fiddlers,
Dancers and drummers,
Varlets and mummers,
Boys and buffoons — all craven loons
That never in burly of battle have bled,
Never have combated sword in hand;
They are only come, the beggars, for bread,
And to feed on the fat of the land.
And the dreadful dismal dysentery
Is among their men, and their horses die,
Of a daily increasing malady.'"

IV.

Lazarus, lord of the Serbs, our Tzar, (*e*)
At Krouchevatch high Slava doth hold.
Around him, sitting by cups of gold,
His sons and his seigneurs are.

To right, the reverend Youg Bogdan; (*f*)
Round whom the nine young Yougovitch;
To left, that thrice-accurséd man,
The traitor black, Vouk Brankovitch;
And many a lord, along the board,
And last of all, in the knightly train,
Milosch, the manly Voïvod;
Next him, Servian Voïvodes twain,
Ivan Kossantchitch, his brother in God,
And Milan Toplitza, a man without stain.

And the Tzar bade pour the purple wine,
And, brimming up his golden cup,
Lookt all adown that lordly line.

"To whom shall the King first pledge?" he began,
"If first to age, this health should be,
To no man do I drink but thee,
Revered old Youg Bogdan;

But if to rank or high degree,
Vouk Brankovitch, I drink to thee. (*g*)
If to friendship be the toast,
My brothers nine, I know not which
Amongst you all I love the most,
You gallant-hearted Yougovitch!
If to beauty, then be thine,
Ivan, first the flowing wine.
If to length and strength of limb,
Then the wine to Milan brim,
No man measures height with him.
If to valour, more than even
Stature, beauty, friendship, age,
Our first honours should be given,
Then to Milosch must we pledge.
Yet, be that as it may be,
Milosch, I drink to none but thee!
Milosch, thy health!
Drink, man, drink!
Why should any man care to think?
Traitor or true, or friend or foe,
To thee I drain this goblet low;
And, ere to-morrow, at Kossovo,
Thou thy master hast betray'd
To the Turk, for wages paid,
(Friend or foe, whate'er befal,
True or traitor, what care I?)
The King drinks to thee in his hall,
Lip to lip, and eye to eye,
Pledge me now in sight of all;
And, since to thee I fill it up,
Take thou too this golden cup,
And add it to ill-gotten wealth —
Milosch, thy health!"

Lightly Milosch bounded up,
Lightly caught the golden cup,
To the black earth bow'd his head,
And "Noble master, thanks!" he said,

" For the pledge thou pledgest me,
And thanks that, of thy courtesy,
Thou to me dost first allot,
A true, true health, O King, to thee,
To pledge back in this golden token;
Thanks for this, my lord, but not
For the words which thou hast spoken.
For, oh! (and may my loyalty,
Dear liege, not fatal prove to me,
Before the truth is judged between
Us, and this fair company!)
My true heart is sound and clean,
Traitor never have I been,
Traitor never will I be!
But at Kossovo to-morrow morn
I trust, as I am a living man,
A soldier and a Christian,
To go to the death for the true, true faith,
True to the last where my faith is sworn,
Careless of calumny, scorning scorn!
The traitor is sitting by thy side,
He toucheth thy robe, thy wine he drinketh,
To God and his king he hath foully lied,
Vouk Brankovitch, the servile-eyed,
Christian false, and perjured friend!
God judge between us twain i' the end,
And perish he in the thought he thinketh!
To-morrow a noble day will be,
For at Kossovo all men shall see
What is the truth betwixt us two,
And who is traitor, and who is true.
For I swear by the great sun in the sky,
And I swear by the living God on high
That judgeth us all, whate'er befal,
When at Kossovo upon battle plain,
Murad, the Turk, I have sought and slain
(Sought and slain, for I swore by the rood
To set my feet in his Turkish blood),
If God but grant me safe and sane

A living man to come again
Back to white-wall'd Krouchevatch,
And there that traitor foul I catch,
Vouk Brankovitch, I will have by the throat
All men shall see it, and all men shall note,
For it shall be done in the light of the sun.
To my good war-lance I will fix his skull,
As a woman fixes a ball of wool
To her distaff when her spinning is done.
Then I will bear him to Kossovo,
Bear him back to the battle plain;
All men shall see it, and all men shall know
Who is the traitor of us twain."

V.

At the royal board a noble pair
Sit together, and full sad they are.
Lazarus and his Militza fair,
The sweet-eyed Tzarina and the Tzar.
Troubled is the Tzar's broad brow,
The Tzarina's eyes are dim,
And, with tears that dare not flow,
The Tzarina says to him: —

"Lord Lazarus, O golden crown
Of Servia, and sweetheart my own!
To-morrow morn to Kossovo
With thee to the battle go
Servitors and Voïvodes.
I alone, in these abodes,
Vacant of thy voice, remain;
Hearing haply, on the wind,
Murmurs of the battle plain;
Heavy of heart, and sad of mind,
Silent in sorrow, alone with pain.
O think on this, my life, my lord,
Never a soul to carry a word

To Kossovo, from me to thee,
To Krouchevatch from thee to me;
Wherefore, lord, of my brothers nine,
The sons of Youg, our father old,
(Golden stars in a crown of gold!)
Let one, for once, be wholly mine.
Mine to witness the tears I weep;
Mine to solace the vigil I keep;
Mine alone, of my nine brothers,
To pray with me for those eight others;
Of brothers nine, but leave me one
To swear by when the rest be gone!"(*h*)

And Lazarus, lord of the Serbs, replied:
"Militza, sweetheart, wife true-eyed,
Of thy nine brothers, tell to me which
Thou lovest best, that he should rest
In our white palace to watch by thee.
Which of them, sweetheart? — tell to me!"
And she answer'd, "Bocko Yougovitch."

And Lazarus, lord of the Serbs, replied:
"Militza, sweetheart, wife true-eyed,
To-morrow, when from her red bower
The watery dawn begins to break,
Ere yet the sun hath felt his power
Seek thou the city walls, and take
Thy post against the Eastern gate:
There shalt thou see the army pass,
To mantle the field in martial state,
And trample the dew-drop out of the grass.
All lusty warriors, leal and true,
Who in battle have never turn'd their backs,
In complete steel, with curtle axe;
Each spearman true, as his own true steel.
And, foremost of all, that, with iron heel,
Crush the wet violet down in the moss,
With purple plumes, in vesture rich,
Thy brother, Bocko Yougovitch,

Bearing the standard of the Cross.
Seize thou the golden bridle-ring,
Greet him fair from his lord the king,
And bid him that he the standard yield
To whomsoever he deemeth best,
And turn about from the battle field,
In our white palace with thee to rest."

VI.

Now, when the dawn from her red bower
Upclomb the chilly skies, and, all
Athwart the freshening city tower,
The silent light began to fall
About the breezy yellow flower
That shook on the shadowy city wall,
Militza, through the glimmering streets,
Goes forth against the Eastern gate.
There, all i' the morning light, she meets
The army on to the distant down,
Winding out of the dusky town,
To mantle the field in martial state,
And trample the dew-drop out of the grass.
O brothers, a goodly sight it was!
With curtle axe, in complete steel,
So many a warrior, lusty and leal,
So many a spearman, stout and true,
Marching to battle in order due.
And foremost among that stately throng,
With, over his helmet's golden boss,
Floating plumes of the purple rich
The gallant Bocko Yougovitch
Bearing the standard of the Cross.
All blazing gold his corselet beam'd,
Imperial purple fold on fold,
The mighty Christian ensign stream'd
Over his red-roan courser bold;
And high upon the standard top

Against the merry morning gleam'd
An apple wrought of purest gold;
Thereon the great gold cross, from which,
All glittering downward, drop by drop,
Great golden acorns, lightly hung,
Over his shining shoulder flung
Flashes of light o'er Yougovitch.

She caught the bridle ring: in check
The red-roan courser paw'd the ground.
About her brother's bended neck
Her milk-white arm she softly wound,
And half in hope, and half in fear,
She whisper'd in the young man's ear:—
"Brother, my liege and thine, the king,
Commits me to thy comforting.
He greets thee fair, and bids me say
(The which with all my heart I pray)
That thou the royal ensign yield
To whomsoever thou deemest best,
And turn about from the battle field
At Krouchevatch with me to rest,
That of nine brothers I may have one
To swear by when the rest be gone."

But "Foul befal," the young man said,
"The man that turns his horse's head,
Whoe'er he be, from battle plain:
Turn thee, sister, turn again
To thy white tower! I will not yield
The Holy Cross 'tis mine to bear,
Nor turn about from the battle field.
Not, though the king should give, I swear
The whole of Krouchevatch to me,
Would I turn thitherwards with thee.
To-day will be the noblest day
Yon sun in heaven did ever see;
Nor shall my own true comrades say
This day, in sorrow or scorn, of me,

— 'The craven heart that dared not go
To the great fight at Kossovo;
That fear'd to find a saintly death,
Nor pour'd his blood for Holy Rood,
Nor fell for the Christian faith.'"
He prickt his horse toward the gate,
And, thro' a cloud of hoary mist
Glittering like one great amethyst,
Swept forth into the morning wan.
Then up there rides in royal state,
With his seven sons, old Youg Bogdan.
She stopt them one by one; she took
The bridle rein; she spoke to them all.
Not one of them all would turn and look:
Not one of them all would listen and wait;
But the trumpet sounded in the gate,
And they follow'd the trumpet call.

And after these, a little space,
Voïn Yougovitch not far
She spied come riding at slow pace,
Leading the destriers of the Tzar, (*i*)
All trapt and housed with gold be they,
And going an amble by the way.
His good steed was of dapple gray.
She caught the bridle ring: in check
The good gray courser paw'd the ground.
Her milk-white arm she softly wound
About her brother's bended neck;
And half in hope, and half in fear,
She whisper'd in the young man's ear: —
"Brother, my liege and thine, the king,
Commits me to thy comforting.
He greets thee fair, and bids me say
(The which with all my heart I pray)
That thou the royal destriers yield
To whomsoever thou deemest best,
And turn about from the battle field
In Krouchevatch with me to rest,

That of nine brothers I may have one
To swear by when the rest be gone."

But "Sister, foul befal," he said,
"The man that turns his horse's head,
Whoe'er he be, from battle plain:
Turn thee, sister, turn again
To thy white tower! I will not yield
The destriers of my lord the Tzar,
Nor turn about from the battle field,
Where all my noble kinsmen are,
Albeit to meet my death I go
To the great fight at Kossovo;
To pour my blood for Holy Rood,
To fight to the death for the Christian faith,
With my kinsmen all to fight and fall,
With our foreheads against the foe."

Through the gate he prickt his steed,
And off to the dreary downs afar,
Leading as fast as he might lead
The destriers of the Tzar.
But Dame Militza, when no more
She heard the echoing hoofs that bore
Her brother from her, even as one
From whom the light of life is gone,
Fell swooning on the cold curb-stone.

Then came the Tzar himself anon,
And his great war-horse pacing on,
Did stoutly neigh in lusty pride;
But when he past beside that stone,
He stopt, and stoopt, and swerv'd aside.
There, all her fair white length o'erthrown,
The Tzar his own true wife espied,
And fast the bitter tears down ran,
As he call'd to his servant, Gouloban.

"Good Gouloban, my faithful friend,
In this thy trusty service prove;
From off thy milk-white horse descend,
And, as thou dost thy master love,
In thy true arms thy mistress take,
With whom to her tall tower go;
And, God forgive thee for my sake,
But go not thou to Kossovo.
I will requite thee when again
I meet thee, if I be not slain,
Howbeit, I deem my doom at hand,
For the Turk is lord of half the land."

Down stept the trusty serving man,
Full fast his bitter tears down ran,
And sad was the heart of Gouloban.
He lifted up that drooping flower,
Lifted her on to his milk-white steed,
And rode with her to her tall tower,
As fast as he might speed.

There laid he her in linen bed,
And lowly laid her lovely head.
But o'er the airy morning smote,
Along the blowing breeze remote,
A solitary trumpet note.
Full well the milk-white war-horse knew
The music of that martial sound,
And in the courtyard paw'd the ground,
And blithely from his nostrils blew
The morning mist. Then Gouloban
Adown the turret stairway ran,
He leapt to stirrup, he leapt to selle.
From fleeting hands he waved farewell;
Again he heard the trumpet blow,
And he rode back to Kossovo.

VII.

All when the misty morn was low,
And the rain was raining heavily
Two ravens came from Kossovo,
Flying along a lurid sky : (*k*)
One after one, they perched upon
The palace of the great Lazar,
And sat upon the turret wall.
One 'gan croak, and one 'gan call,
"Is this the palace of the Tzar ?
And is there never a soul inside ?"

Was never a soul within the hall,
To answer to the ravens' call,
Save Militza. She espied
The two black birds on the turret wall,
That all in the wind and rain did croak,
And thus the ravens she bespoke :
"In God's great name, black ravens, say,
Whence came ye on the wind to-day ?
Is it from the plain of Kossovo ?
Hath the bloody battle broke ?
Saw ye the two armies there ?
Have they met ? And, friend or foe,
Which hath vanquisht ? How do they fare ?"

And the two black fowls replied :
"In God's great name, Militza, dame,
From Kossovo at dawn we came.
A bloody battle we espied :
We saw the two great armies there,
They have met, and ill they fare.
Fallen, fallen, fallen are
The Turkish and the Christian Tzar.
Of the Turks is nothing left ;
Of the Serbs a remnant rests,
Hackt and hewn, carved and cleft,

Broken shields, and bloody breasts."
And lo! while yet the ravens spoke,
Up came the servant, Miloutine:
And he held his right hand, cleft
By a ghastly sabre stroke,
Bruis'd and bloody, in his left;
Gasht with gashes seventeen
Yawn'd his body where he stood,
And his horse was dripping blood.

"O sorrow, sorrow, bitter woe
And sorrow, Miloutine!" she said;
"For now I know my lord is dead.
For, were he living, well I know,
Thou hadst not left at Kossovo
Thy lord forsaken to the foe."

And Miloutine spake, breathing hard:
"Get me from horse: on cool greensward
Lay me, lay me, mistress mine:
A little water from the well
To bathe my wounds in water cold,
For they are deep and manifold;
And touch my lip with rosy wine,
That I may speak before I die.
I would not die before I tell
The tale of how they fought and fell."
She got him from his bloody steed,
And wiped the death-drops from his brow,
And in the fresh grass laid him low;
And washt his wounds in water cold,
For they were deep and manifold;
Full ghastly did they gape and bleed:
She stanch'd them with her garment's fold,
And lightly held his body up,
And bathed his lips with rosy wine,
And all the while her tears down ran,
And dropt into the golden cup;
And still she question'd of the war:

"O tell me, tell me, Miloutine,
Where fell the glorious Prince Lazar?
Where are fallen my brothers nine?
Where my father, Youg Bogdan?
Where Milosch, where Vouk Brankovitch?
And where Strahinia Banovitch?"

Then when the servant, Miloutine,
Three draughts had drain'd of rosy wine,
Although his eyes were waxing dim,
A little strength came back to him.
He stood up on his feet, and, pale
And ghastly, thus began the tale·

"They will never return again,
Never return! ye shall see them no more;
Nor ever meet them within the door,
Nor hold their hands. Their hands are cold,
Their bodies bleach in bloody mould.
They are slain! all of them slain!
And the maidens shall mourn, and the mothers deplore,
Heaps of dead heroes on battle plain.
Where they fell, there they remain,
Corpses stiff in their gore.
But their glory shall never grow old.
Fallen, fallen, in mighty war,
Fallen, fighting about the Tzar,
Fallen, where fell our lord Lazar!
Never more be there voice of cheer!
Never more be there song or dance!
Muffled be moon and star!
For broken now is the lance,
Shiver'd both shield and spear,
And shatter'd the scimitar.
And cleft is the golden crown,
And the sun of Servia is down,
O'erthrown, o'erthrown, o'erthrown,
The roof and top of our renown,
Dead is the great Lazar!

"Have ye seen when the howling storm-wind takes
The topmost pine on a hoary rock,
Tugs at it, and tears, and shakes, and breaks,
And tumbles it into the ocean?
So when this bloody day began, —
In the roaring battle's opening shock,
Down went the gray-hair'd Youg Bogdan.
And following him, the noblest man
That ever wore the silver crown
Of age, grown gray in old renown.
One after one, and side by side
Fighting, thy nine brothers died:
Each by other, brother brother
Following, till death took them all.
But of these nine the last to fall
Was Bocko. Him, myself, I saw,
Three awful hours — a sight of awe,
Here, and there, and everywhere,
And all at once, made manifest,
Like a wild meteor in a troubled air,
Whose motion never may be guest.
For over all the lurid rack
Of smoking battle, blazed and burn'd,
And stream'd and flasht,
Like flame before the wind upturn'd
The great imperial ensign splasht
With blood of Turks: where'er he dasht
Amongst their bruised battalions, I
Saw them before him reel and fly:
As when a falcon from on high,
Pounce on a settle-down of doves,
That murmurs make in myrrhy groves,
Comes flying all across the sky,
And scatters them with instant fright;
So flew the Turks to left and right,
Broken before him. Milosch fell,
Pursued by myriads down the dell,
Upon Sitnitza's rushy brink,

Whose chilly waves will roll, I think,
So long as time itself doth roll,
Red with remorse that they roll o'er him.
Christ have mercy on his soul,
And blesséd be the womb that bore him.
Not alone he fell. Before him
Twelve thousand Turkish soldiers fell,
Slaughter'd in the savage dell.
His right hand was wet and red
With the blood that he had shed,
And in that red right hand he had
(Shorn from the shoulder sharp) the head
Of the Turkish Tzar, Murad.

" There resteth to Servia a glory,
A glory that shall not grow old;
There remaineth to Servia a story,
A tale to be chanted and told!
They are gone to their graves grim and gory,
The beautiful, brave, and bold;
But out of the darkness and desolation,
Of the mourning heart of a widow'd nation,
Their memory waketh an exultation!
Yea, so long as a babe shall be born,
Or there resteth a man in the land—
So long as a blade of corn
Shall be reapt by a human hand—
So long as the grass shall grow
On the mighty plain of Kossovo—
So long, so long, even so,
Shall the glory of those remain
Who this day in battle were slain.

" And as for what ye inquire
Of Vouk,—when the worm and mole
Are at work on his bones, may his soul
Eternally singe in hell-fire!
Curst be the womb that bore him!
Curst be his father before him!

Curst be the race and the name of him!
And foul as his sin be the fame of him!
For blacker traitor never drew sword —
False to his faith, to his land, to his lord!
And doubt ye, doubt ye, the tale I tell?
Ask of the dead, for the dead know well;
Let them answer ye, each from his mouldy bed
For there is no falsehood among the dead:
And there be twelve thousand dead men know,
Who betray'd the Tzar at Kossovo"

NOTES.

(*a*) The word is *sitni*, "fine, slender, elaborate." This, in Servian poetry, is the epithet invariably applied to hand-writing; and the deference and wonder with which the writing of a letter, or the use of pen, ink, and paper, in any shape, is alluded to throughout the poetry of the Serbs, sufficiently indicates an elementary and barbarous condition of social life.

(*b*) Lazarus Grebleanovitch is sometimes called Tzar, sometimes knès or prince. But he was consecrated Tzar in 1376.

(*c*) The word *Pobratime* (from *brat*, "brother") denotes a relationship (independent of blood or kindred) between persons of the same sex, which is peculiar to the Serbs. For in the Bulgarian the word signifies nothing more than friend. But in Servia it constitutes a relationship voluntarily contracted, but so close as to be incompatible with marriage between the one Pobratime and the sister of the other (*see* note to page 325). In the ancient Servian liturgies are to be found prayers applicable to the consecration of this relationship by the priest. It is a sort of free-masonry, and obliges those who have contracted it to succour each other in danger or sickness. Appeal in such cases, the usual form of which it is held impious to reject, and which, in the Serb poetry, is sometimes placed in the mouth even of Turks and Vilas, is "*Bogom bratá* (or *sestra*) *i svetim Jovanom*," "My brother, or sister, in God and Saint John."

(*d*) The whole of this passage is quite oriental in the hyperbolical character of the similes it piles together. Strange, that Marlowe, in (perhaps his greatest) play of

'Tamburlaine," should have placed in the mouth of an Oriental monarch very similar language;

(*King of Moroco*, loquitur):

"*The spring is hinder'd by your smothering host;*
For neither rain can fall upon the earth,
Nor sun reflex his virtuous beams thereon,
The ground is mantled with such multitudes."

Was it by intuition? But Marlowe himself rivals the orientals in gigantesque exaggeration and supercilious indifference to simplicity.

(*e*) The *slava* (literally "glory") is a very ancient custom peculiar to the Serbs, and still honoured in the observance. Every family, or tribe (rather in the sense of the Roman *gens*), independently of the patron saints particular to each of its individual members, has a patron common to them all, as Saint Dimitri, Saint Nicholas, Saint Elias, &c.; who is, on periodical occasions, celebrated with certain ceremonies of a convivial kind, beginning in solemn libation to some sacred toast, and ending in general intoxication. These ceremonies are called *slaviti slavou*, and the toasts *zradarita*. It is the popular belief that the celebrated Servian hero, Marko Kralievitch, annually returns to life on the 5th of May, and holds, in the church of Prilip, the Slava of St. George.

(*f*) All these personages are historical, and figure in the Pesmas which refer to the great battle of Kossovo. Youg Bogdan (*youg*, "South") was the father-in-law of Lazarus, and Governor of Acarnania and Macedonia. Yougovitch, the sons of Youg — *vitch*, or *vitz*, always implying "son of" — as Alexander Karageorgiovitz, son of Kara-George; Milosch Obrenovitz, son of Obren, the last and present Prince of Servia.

(*g*) Vouk Brankovitch, a son-in-law of Lazarus. A circumstance similar to that which forms the main plot of the Niebelungen, namely, a quarrel between the wives of the two men, is supposed to have led to that deadly hatred between Vouk and Milosch Obilitch, which ultimately brought about the defection of the one and the death of the other. Of the estimation in which the memory of this personage is held amongst the Serbs and other Sclavic races, judge from the following passage in the Code of Montenegro, dated 1803:

"And if, from this day henceforth, any Montenegrin

should be found capable of betraying his country, we devote, him, beforehand, to the eternal malediction reserved for Judas, who betrayed the Lord God, and the infamous Vouk Brankovitch, who betrayed the Serbs at Kossovo, and thus forfeited the divine mercy."

(*h*) The affection between brother and sister, or brother and brother, would appear to be held among the Serbs as more sacred than that arising out of any other relationship. Ironical comparison frequently occurs throughout the Servian poetry between the affection of wife to husband, and of sister to brother, not to the advantage of the former. Consequently the oath sworn "by a brother" is especially sacred, and not to have "a brother to swear by" is held to be a family disgrace. The whole poem of "Predag and Nenad" (which I have not translated) is founded on this sense of humiliation, involved in the fact of not having a brother to swear by.

(*i*) For the use of this word, destriers, I plead the authority of Chaucer.

> "And, for he was a knight auntrous.
> He n'oldë sleepen in none hous,
> But liggen in his hood,
> His brightë helm was his avenger,
> And by him baited his destrer,
> Of herbës fine and good."
> *Rime of Sir Thopas.*

(*k*) In the Servian poetry, ravens are the invariable bearers of ill tidings.

POPULAR OR DOMESTIC PESMAS.

I.

THE STAG AND THE VILA.

'ER the mountain, the wild stag browses
the mountain herbage alone,
At morn he browses, at noon he sickens,
at eve he maketh moan.
From the rifts of the rocky quarries the Vila* hears him, and calls,

* The Vilas are supernatural beings that appear frequently in the poetry, and exist to this day in the popular superstition, of the Serbs. I have been unable to trace their origin, but they would seem to be a remnant of the early Slave mythology; and, being a mountain race, to have survived the fate of the lowland members of the fairy family, notwithstanding the presence of perhaps almost as many "holy freres" as those to whose "*blessing of thorpes and dairies*," Chaucer, in his day, attributed the fact that "*there bin no fairies*." They are a kind of fierce Oreads, dwelling among the mountains and forests, and sometimes about the margin of waste waters. Their attributes are varying, and not distinctly ascertainable, but they are mostly terrible, and hostile to man. They are not, however, incapable of sympathy with the human race; for they have been known (though generally after being vanquished by them) to love great heroes. Evidence of this is to be found in the recorded exploits of Marko Kralievitch. That hero was beloved by one of these beings, who, indeed, prophesied his death, and that of his horse, Charatz. This animal was aged above one hundred and fifty years at the period of his death, and, according to some authorities, was the gift of a Vila. The love of these beings, however, is generally treacherous, and often fatal. The Vilas are not immortal, nor invulnerable. The Vila Raviocla, who wounded the voivode Milosch with a golden arrow, was nearly massacred by Marko. They preserve, however, through incalculable time, supernatural youth and beauty. They believe in God and Saint John, and abhor the Turks. When they appear to mortal eyes it is as

"Unwedded maids,
Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows
Than have the white breasts of the Queen of Love,"

"O beast of the mountain meadows, the woods, and the waterfalls,
What sorrow is thine, so great that, browsing at morn, at noon thou ailest,
And now to the stars thou art moaning? What is it that thou bewailest?"
And the stag to the Vila makes answer, mournfully moaning low:
"O queen of the mountain, my sister! I mourn for my lost white doe,
My milk-white doe, my darling! from me, o'er the mountain track,
She wander'd away to the fountain; she wander'd, she never came back.
Either forlornly she wanders, mourning me, missing her way,
Or the hunters have follow'd and found her, and she hath perisht their prey,
Or else she forgets me, the faithless thing! and ever by valley and crag
Strays wanton after a belling note, and follows another stag.
If she be lost in the lonesome places, and hollows under the moon,
I pray that God, of his goodness, will guide her back to me soon.
If the hunters have slain my beloved one, wandering the woodland alone,
I pray that God, of his justice, will send them a fate like my own;
But if she follows another stag, caring no more to come back,
I pray that God, in his vengeance, guide the hunter fleet on her track."

with long hair floating over their shoulders, and clothed in snow-white vesture. They are wise in the use of herbs and simples, they know the properties of every flower and berry, and possess strange medical arts.

II.

LOVE AND SLEEP.

I WALKT the high and hollow wood, from dawn to even-dew,
The wild-eyed wood stared on me, and unclaspt, and let me through,
Where mountain pines, like great black birds, stood percht against the blue.

Not a whisper heaved the woven woof of those warm trees:
All the little leaves lay flat, unmoved of bird or breeze:
Day was losing light all round, by indolent degrees.

Underneath the brooding branches, all in holy shade,
Unseen hands of mountain things a mossy couch had made:
There asleep among pale flowers my beloved was laid.

Slipping down, a sunbeam bathed her brows with bounteous gold,
Unmoved upon her maiden breast her heavy hair was roll'd,
Her smile was silent as the smile on corpses thre hours old.

"O God!" I thought, "if this be death, that makes not sound nor stir!"
My heart stood still with tender awe, I dared not waken her,
But to the dear God, in the sky, this prayer I did prefer:

"Grant, dear Lord, in the blesséd sky, a warm
wind from the sea,
To shake a leaf down on my love from yonder
leafy tree;
That she may open her sweet eyes, and haply
look on me."

The dear God, from the distant sea, a little wind
released,
It shook a leaflet from the tree, and laid it on her
breast.
Her sweet eyes ope'd, and looked on me. How
can I tell the rest?

III.

TITTLE-TATTLE.

Two lovers kist in the meadow green,
They thought there was none to espy:
But the meadow green told what it had seen
To the white flock wandering by.
The white flock told it the shepherd:
The shepherd the traveller from far:
The traveller told it the mariner,
Watching the pilot star:
The mariner told it his little bark:
The little bark told it the sea:
The sea told it the river,
Flowing down by the lea:
The river told it the maiden's mother,
And so to the maid it came back:
The maiden, as soon as she heard it,
Curst them all for a tell-tale pack:
"Meadow, be barren forever,
Grass, grow not henceforth from the mould of thee
Flock, be devour'd by the wolf!

Shepherd, the Turk seize hold of thee!
Traveller, rot of the fever!
Mariner, drown in the gulf!
Bark, may the whirlwind perplex thee,
And break thee against the shore!
Sea, may the moon ever vex thee!
River, be dry evermore!"

IV.

MATRIMONIAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Where mountains shut the silence up, a milk-
white maiden stood:
Her face was like a light, and kindled all the
solitude.
And, while the wild white mountain flowers turned
passionately pale,
And while the chilly water ran reluctant to the
vale,
And the bald eagle, near the sun, stood still on
some tall peak,
That milk-white maiden to her own sweet face
began to speak:

"O face, sweet source of all my care,
Fair face (because I know thee fair!)
If I knew thou shouldst be kist
By any husband, wither'd, old, and gray,
I would wander, mist-like, with the mist,
The monstrous mountain many a league away,
Until, in some abandon'd place,
Where the starved wolf cracks the bones
Of perisht men, and the wind groans
For want of something to devour,
I should find, wild in the wind,
Among the blotcht and mildew'd stones,

The harsh-blowing absinth flower;
And pluck the stubborn root of it,
That from the bitter fruit of it
I might the blighting juice express;
Therewith to bathe thee, O my face, my face!
Till all thy beauty should be bitterness,
And each unloved caress
Burn on the old man's lip, which should embrace
Death on thy rosy portals, O my face!

"But if I knew, O my face, my face!
That thy lips should be kist by whom I would list,
I would glide, unespied, to a place, my face,
Where red roses, I know, ripely ripple and blow,
And white lilies grow more snowy than snow;
And all in the balmy evening light,
While the dew is new, and the stars but a few,
The roses so red, and the lilies so white,
I would pluck, with the sunset upon them, and
press
From those flowers their sweetest sweetnesses,
To embalm thee, my face, till what he should
embrace
Should be fairer than lilies and richer than roses;
So that when on thy lips my belov'd one reposes,
A thousand summers of fragrant sighs
Might fan the faint fire of his soul's desire
With raptures pure as the rivers that rise
Among the valleys of Paradise."

V.

LOVE CONFERS NOBILITY.

He. VIOLET,* little one mine!
I would love thee, but thou art so small.

* Violet is a pet name, as well as a proper name.

She. Love me, my love, from those heights of thine,
And I shall grow tall, so tall!
The pearl is small, but it hangs above
A royal brow, and a kingly mind:
The quail is little, little my love,
But she leaves the hunter behind.

VI.

A SOUL'S SWEETNESS.

He. O MAIDEN of my soul!
What odour from the orange hast thou stole,
That breathes about thy breast with such sweet power?
What sweetness, unto me
More sweet than amber honey to the bee
That builds i' the oaken bole,
And sucks the essential summer of the year
To store with sweetest sweets her hollow tower?
Or is it breath of basil, maiden dear?
Or of the immortal flower?

She By the sweet heavens, young lover!
No odour from the orange have I stole;
Nor have I robb'd for thee,
Dearest, the amber dower
Of the building bee,
From any hollow tower
In oaken bole:
But if, on this poor breast thou dost discover
Fragrance of such sweet power,
Trust me, O my belovéd and my lover,
'Tis not of basil, nor the immortal flower,
But from a virgin soul.

VII.

REMINISCENCES.

He. And art thou wed, my Belovéd?
My Belovéd of long ago!

She. I am wed, my Belovéd. And I have given
A child to this world of woe.
And the name I have given my child is thine:
So that, when I call to me my little one,
The heaviness of this heart of mine
For a little while may be gone.
For I say not . . . "Hither, hither, my son!"
But . . . "Hither, my Love, my Belovéd!"

VIII.

SLEEP AND DEATH.

The morning is growing: the cocks are crowing:
Let me away, love, away!

'Tis not the morning light;
Only the moonbeam white.
Stay, my white lamb, stay,
And sleep on my bosom, sleep!

The breeze is blowing: the cattle are lowing:
Let me away, love, away!

'Tis not the cattle there;
Only the call to prayer.
Stay, my white lamb, stay,
And sleep on my bosom, sleep!

The Turks are warning to the mosk: 'tis morning
Let me away, love, away!

'Tis not the Turks, sweet soul!
Only the wolves that howl.
Stay, my white lamb, stay,
And sleep on my bosom, sleep!

The white roofs are gleaming: the glad children
screaming:
Let me away, love, away!

'Tis the night-clouds that gleam:
The night winds that scream.
Stay, my white lamb, stay,
And sleep on my bosom, sleep!

My mother in the gateway calls to me . "Come
straightway!"
And I must away, love, away!

Thy mother's in her bed,
Dumb, holy, and dead.
Stay, my white lamb, stay,
And sleep on my bosom, sleep!

IX.

A CONJUGAL DISPUTE.

All at the mid of the night, there arose
A quarrel 'twixt husband and wife;
For, the young Omer Bey and his spouse,
Falling into discussion and strife,
Wild words to each other they said,
Side by side, at the dead
Of the night, on their marriage bed.

Had it been about anything less
The quarrel might have passt by;
But it was not a trifle, you guess,
That set words running so high.
Yet the cause in dispute (to be brief)
Was only a white handkerchief,
Broider'd all over with gold,
And scented with rose and with amber,
So sweet the whole house could not hold
That scent from the nuptial chamber.
For (the whole truth herewith to disclose),
This handkerchief border'd with gold,
And scented with amber and rose,
Had been given to the Bey (to enfold
Her letters, which lay on his breast),
By the mistress that he loved best.
But his wife had a sensitive nose
For the scent of amber and rose;
And the fiend himself only knows
Whether, but for a lie, ere the close
Of that quarrel there had not been blows.

"You know I've a sister, my treasure,
The wife of our friend Zekir Bey;
I love her, you know, beyond measure,
And she, dear, on our bridal day,
To me gave this white handkerchief,
Border'd all over with gold,
And scented with amber and rose;
Which precious, for her sake, I hold,
Though the scent of it, much to my grief,
Has troubled our nuptial repose."

Smiling, her husband she heard,
Feeling no faith in his word,
For troubled his face was, she saw.
Up she leapt by the light of the taper,
Barefooted, and seized ink and paper;
And wrote to her sister-in-law:—

"Wife of our friend, Zekir Bey,
Long live thy husband, nought ail him,
Mayst thou never have cause to bewail him!
Speak truth, and fear nothing. But say
(For truly the truth must be told)
To thy brother, on our bridal day,
Didst thou give a white handkerchief, brightly
Embroidered all over with gold,
And scented with rose and with amber
So sweet, that the scent of it nightly
May be smelt in the Bey's bridal chamber?"

When this came to the wife of the Bey,
She burst into tears, as she read:
And "Pity upon me!" she said,
"For I know not, alas! what to say.
If I speak truth, I put strife
'Twixt the brother I love and his wife;
If I speak false, much I dread
Lest my husband die for it," she said.

Then the letter she laid in her breast,
And she ponder'd with many a sigh,
"I choose of two evils the least,
If my husband must die, let him die!
Since the choice lies 'twixt one or the other—
Any husband a woman may spare,
But the sister that injures a brother
Does that which she cannot repair."

Thus shrewdly the matter she saw:
And she wrote to her sister-in-law:—

"Wife of my brother, the Bey!
My husband is well. May nought ail him!
And I trust I shall never bewail him.
To my brother on your marriage day
(And truly the truth shall be told)
I gave a white handkerchief brightly

Embroidered all over with gold,
And scented with rose and with amber
So sweet, that the scent (as you say,
And as I cannot doubt of it) nightly
May be smelt in the Bey's bridal chamber"

X.

DEGREES OF AFFECTION.

Up and down the Tchardak,* underneath the blossom'd roof,
Musing, young Iövo,† at midnoon, walkt all aloof.
Suddenly the Tchardak broke beneath him: slipping through
The rotten plank, he fell, and his right arm was snapt in two.
Straight, a leech he sought him. Evil leech, in truth, he found.
Save the mountain Vila, none had skill to heal the wound:
But the Vila claim'd in price of service, ere the cure began,
The right hand of the mother of the maim'd and mangled man;
The long hair of his sister with the riband in the hair;
And the white pearl necklace which his wife was wont to wear.
The mother gave her right hand, and the sister gave her curls;
But the wife refused her necklace . . . "I? I will not give my pearls!

* A sort of gallery or veranda, running round a house Also, sometimes, a pavilion, summer-house, or granary.
† Diminutive for Iovan or John

Each is perfect, each is precious, nowhere else is such a set.
'Twas my dowry from my father, and I mean to wear it yet."
This the Vila of the mountain heard; and, anger'd in her mood,
She dropt a little purple drop of poison in the food
Of young Iövo, and he died.

Then, for the murder'd man,
Those three women to lament, in funeral dole began.
One there was that, deeply mourning, evermore did grieve:
One that miss'd and mourn'd for him at morning and at eve:
One that mourn'd him now and then, with eyes a little dim,
And looks a little changed, whenever she remember'd him.
She whose sorrow ceased not, mourning more than any other,
Missing aye her murder'd son, was young Iövo's mother:
She that mourn'd at morning, and at evening mourn'd, and miss'd her
Brother, when day came or went, was young Iövo's sister.
She that mourn'd him now and then, when some times in her life
Old memories fill'd vacant hours, was young Iövo's wife.

XL.

THE FAIR IKONIA.

THE fair Ikonia boasted at the bath,
Gayly, amidst the matrons . . . "Tell me which
Amongst you, matrons, such a husband hath
As mine, Iövo Morniakovitch?
Where he goeth, there I go:
Where he resteth, there rest I:
Is he silent, then I know
That he names me silently:
Does he speak? of me he speaketh:
Does he dream? of me he dreameth:
Does he wake? for me he waketh:
Mine by night, when moonlight beameth!
Mine at dawn, when daylight breaketh!
First from dreams of me to wake,
That his kiss may ope my eyes:
'*Dear, the dawn begins to break,*
Light of my life, arise! arise!'
Life is long, the journey through it
Lone and weary, others tell.
I shall never turn and miss him
From my side, and this is well."
This the wily widow, Anna,
Heard, and slyly slipt away:
Then she clothed herself with splendour
And she stood, in rich array,
Where, from the Bazar, Iövo
Came home, singing all the way:
Deckt her cheeks with painted roses,
Darker dyed her midnight hair,
Breath'd the breath of perfumed posies,
Laid her bounteous bosom bare,
Stood like glory in the gateway,
Murmur'd, mild as evening air,

"Sad, Iövo, seems thy case,
Wedded to a barren wife;
If thou wouldst not see thy race
Pass and perish, with thy life,
Wed with me, and I will bear thee
Every year a noble heir,
Every year a gracious infant,
With strong hands and golden hair."*

Long he listen'd: soft her voice was;
Long he lookt: her dark eyes glisten'd.
As the counsel, so the choice was.
All too long he lookt and listen'd.
Thus the wily widow, Anna,
Won Iövo then and there:
And each year a boy she bore him
With strong hands and golden hair.
Silent walkt the fair Ikonia,
Making neither moan nor word,
Up the great Bazar walkt silent,
And she bought herself a cord:

In the garden square a golden
Orange-tree grows all alone,
There her silken cord she fasten'd,
And she hang'd herself thereon.

Came one running to Iövo,
"On thy golden orange-tree,
Fair Ikonia, dead, is hanging."

"Hanging? Let her hang!" quoth he,
"I've a fairer far than she."

* The epithet "golden" generally implies 'strength" in the Serb poetry. The words are literally "with golden hands," &c.

XII.

A WISH.

I WOULD I were a rivulet,
And I know where I would run!
To Save, the chilly river,
Where the market boats pass on;
To see my dear one stand
By the rudder; and whether the rose
Which, at parting, I put in his hand,
Warm with a kiss in it, blows;
Whether it blows or withers:
I pluckt it on Saturday;
I gave it to him on Sunday;
On Monday he went away.

XIII.

IMPERFECTION.

ALL in the spring,
When little birds sing,
And flowers do talk
From stalk to stalk;
Whispering to a silver shower,
A violet did boast to be
Of every flower the fairest flower
That blows by lawn or lea.
But a rose that blew thereby
Answer'd her reproachfully,
(All in the spring,
When little birds sing,
And flowers do talk
From stalk to stalk):
"Violet, I marvel me

Of fairest flowers by lawn or lea
The fairest thou shouldst boast to be;
For one small defect I spy,
Should make thee speak more modestly:
Thy face is fashion'd tenderly,
But then it hangs awry."

XIV.

EMANCIPATION.

The Day of Saint George! and a girl pray'd thus:
" O Day of Saint George, when again to us
Thou returnest, and they carouse
Here in my mother's house,
Mayst thou find me either a corpse or a bride,
Either buried or wed;
Rather married than dead;
But however that may betide,
And whether a corpse or a spouse,
No more in my mother's house."

XV.

THE VOICE OF NATURE; OR, WHAT THE FISH SAID TO THE MAIDEN.

By the sea a maiden is sitting,
And she says to herself at her knitting:

" O my heart! what more deep than the ocean,
Or more wide than the plain, can be?
Or more swift than the horse in his motion?
Or more sweet than the food of the bee?
Or more dear than a brother?"

And a fish from the sea replies:

" O maiden, but little wise!
The plain is less wide than the sea,
And the heaven more deep than this is;
Eyes swifter than horses be;
And honey less sweet than kisses;
And a lover more dear than all other"

XVI.

THE MALADY OF MOÏO.

Moïo, the Tzarovitch (bolder is no man!)
Walkt to the Bath with the Turk lords one day:
Mahmoud the Pacha's white wife (and what woman
Is fairer than she is?) was walking away.
Even as the sun, o'er the ardours of even,
Looks on the moon, and the moon on the sun,
Wistfully, each, disunited in heaven,
Soon to be pacing far pathways alone,
So through the mist of a moment of ecstasy,
Thrill'd with a rapture delicious and dim,
Mute on the pale Pachinitza the Tzarovitch
Gazed, and the pale Pachinitza on him.
Moïo walkt silently back to his palace:
Troubled his heart was, and changed was his mood.
Straightway he sicken'd of love, and lay dying,
Dying of love for the wife of Mahmoud.
Ladies the loveliest all came to visit him:
Only the wife of Mahmoud stay'd away.
Then the Sultana rose up and wrote to her —
" Wouldst thou be greater than all of us, say?
Moïo is lying upon his couch dying;
Sore is his sickness, and fatal they say:
Ladies the loveliest all come to visit him,
Thou, art thou more, Pachinitza, than they?

She, when she heard of it, loopt up her white sleeve.
Loopt up her light robe as white as a star;
Presents she bore for him, worthy a monarch's son,
Figs from the sea-coast, and grapes from Mostar.
Lightly she trod o'er the long golden gallery,
Past all ungreeted the corridor dim,
Pale, the dumb purple pavilion she enter'd,
Where the Sultana was watching by him.
Softly she sat by his bed-side, and softly
Wiped from his forehead the fever, and said,
"This is a malady known to me surely!
Long did I watch, and long weep by the bed
Once where my brother lay moaning and mad of it,
Moaning and madden'd, unable to move;
Poison they said it was. I, too, have drunk of it.
This is the passionate poison of love."
Trembling he listen'd, as trembling she utter'd it.
Lightly he leapt from the couch where he lay,
Fasten'd, behind her, the long golden gallery,
Laught as he sank on her soft lips, and they
Three white days, little heeding the daylight,
Three blue nights, little noting the moon,
Seal'd by sweet kisses in silent caresses,
Rested, while round them May melted to June.
Gayly the nightingale sang in the garden.
Love the bird sang of, and sweet was the tune.
Three white days, little loving the daylight,
Three blue nights, ill at rest 'neath the moon,
Mahmoud the Pacha walkt, mourning his miss'd one,
"Come, Pachinitza, come back to me soon!"
Sadly the nightingale sang in his garden.
Love the bird sang of, but harsh was the tune.
Then, when the fourth day was low in the orient,
Mahmoud the Pacha sat down in his hall;
There a white letter he wrote to the Sultan:
"Sultan Imperial, dear master of all!
There's a white dove, with a gold treasure casket,
Flown to thy doors from thy servant's abode.
Send back my white dove, restore me my treasure,

If thou hast fear of the justice of God."
But to the Pacha the Sultan sent answer:
"Mahmoud, my servant, behoves thee to know
There's in my palace a falcon unhooded,
And what he hath taken he never lets go."

XVII.

A SERVIAN BEAUTY.

Tis the Kolo* that dances before the white house,
And 'tis Stoian's fair sister, O fair, fair is she!
Too fair she is truly, too fair, heaven knows,
(God forgive her!) so cruel to be.
The fair Vila, whom the wan clouds fondly follow
O'er the mountain wherever she roam it,
Is not fairer nor whiter than she.
Her long soft eyelash is the wing of the swallow
When the dew of the dawn trembles from it,
And as dawn-stars her blue eyes to me;
Her eyebrows so dark are the slender sea-leeches;†
Her rich-blooméd cheeks are the ripe river peaches,
Her teeth are white pearls from the sea;
Her lips are two half-open'd roses;
And her breath the south wind, which discloses
The sweetness that soothes the wild bee.
he is tall as the larch, she is slender

* *Kolo*, signifying literally a wheel, is the generic term for all the Servian national dances; in most of which the dancers, either taking hands, or united each to each by a handkerchief tied round the waist or to the girdle, form a ring and advance or retreat to and from the centre to a monotonous music, either of the voice or some very simple wind instruments. Both sexes take part in these dances, which are frequently in the open air.

† A strange, but very frequent, simile in Servian poetry.

As any green bough the birds move;
See her dance — 'tis the peacock's full splendour!
Hear her talk — 'tis the coo of the dove!
And, only but let her look tender —
'Tis all heaven melting down from above!

XVIII.

A DISCREET YOUNG WOMAN.

Militza has long soft eyelashes,
So darkly-dreaming droopt on either cheek,
You scarce can guess what little lightning flashes
From those deep eyes, beneath them beaming, break.
And her fair face, like a flower,
Has such drooping ways about it,
I have watcht her, many an hour,
Three full years (O never doubt it!)
And yet never have seen fairly
Eyes or face, — reveal'd so rarely!

Only just to rob one glance
From the happy grass beneath her,
On the green where maidens dance
When the month makes merry weather,
I the Kolo call'd together,
Trusting to my happy chance.
While the dance grew sweeter, faster,
(Bosoms heaving, tresses shaken,)
Suddenly with dim disaster
All the sky was overtaken.
Rolling darkness drown'd the sunlight,
Rolling thunder drencht the valleys,
And in heaven was left but one light
From the lightning's livid sallies.

Like a necklace lightly shatter'd,
Shedding rubies, shedding pearls,
Here and there the Kolo scatter'd
All its bevy of bright girls.
Little, darling, timid creatures!
Each, with frighten'd, flutter'd features,
Lifted up her pretty eyes
To the tempest growling o'er her;
But Militza, very wise,
Still kept looking straight before her.

Little voices, silvery, wild,
All at once, in fretful cadence,
Brake out chiding the sweet child.
"What, Militza!" cried the maidens,
"Those grass-grazing eyes, I wonder,
From the ground can nothing startle?
Hark, child! how it groans, the thunder!
See! the lightnings, how they dartle
Here and there by angry fits,
In and out the stormy weather!
Hast thou wholly lost thy wits,
Little fool? Or must we deem
Thou wouldst something wiser seem
Than the whole world put together?"

But Militza answers . . . "Neither
Have I lost my wits, nor grown
Wiser, maidens, I must own,
Than the whole world put together.
I am not the Vila white,
Who, amidst her mountain ranges,
Lifting looks of stormy light,
Through his fifty moody changes,
Wooes the tempest's troubled sprite
Down the mountain melting o'er her —
I am not a Vila white,
But a girl that looks before her."

XIX.

BOLOZÀNOVITCH, THE KNAVE.

DJOUL,* the Turk, on a morning in May,
When every bird is brilliant in feather,
And every flower in blossom is gay,
To celebrate sweetly the merry May weather,
From dawn to dusk, in dance and play,
Call'd a hundred matrons and maids together.
And the fairest maiden of all, that day,
Was the maid Bolozànovitch loved, they say.

He sought her all a summer noon,
And on to eventide;
He sought her under the summer moon,
Through all the country wide,
Till at nightfall he came, in the mist and murk,
To the lighted house of Djoul, the Turk.

"Djoul, Djoul with the raven hair!
Give me a shift of linen fair,
Such as thyself art wont to wear
On the day when the glad new moon is born;
Paint me the eyebrow with antimony;
These bronzéd cheeks with white and red
Colour; and comb me, and curl me the head;
Hang me over the shoulders free
Silken tresses two or three,
Such as by matron or maid are worn;
Bind me the brow with a golden braid,
And clothe me, anon, in the clothes of a maid
From head to foot, with many a fold
Of the milk-white tunic flowing and full;
And give me a distaff of gold
And a ball of Egyptian wool;
Then suffer me thus 'mid the maidens to move,
That I may speak to the maiden I love."

* For *Gul*, the Turk word, meaning *rose*.

Djoul, the Turk with the raven hair,
Laught as she listen'd, and granted his prayer.
She clothed him in clothes of a maid,
Comb'd him and curl'd him the hair,
Painted his dark face fair,
Over his long limbs laid
Many a milk-white fold
Of vesture flowing and full;
Then gave him a distaff of gold,
And a ball of Egyptian wool;
And when he was trickt, and pincht, and padded
And painted, and plaster'd, to look like a lass,
Because he yet lookt like the knave that he was,
This good counsel she added:

"Bolozànovitch, knave, take note!
When anon, 'mid our women ye stand,
The old women take by the hand,
And kiss on their finger tips;
The young women kiss on the lips;
But, for those that are maidens and girls,
You shall kiss them under the throat,
And over the collar of pearls."

Bolozànovitch gladly (the knave!)
Gave heed to the counsel she gave,
And of all, as she bade him, took note.
The old women each on the finger tips
He kist, and the young women each on the lips,
And the maidens under the throat.

Maidenlike thus 'mid the maidens he moved,
Drooping the eyelid over the ground;
But when he came to the maiden he loved,
He made her a little red wound
Just in the soft white fold
Of her slender throat. Then she
Cried out to the women around,
"Strike! strike, with your distaffs of gold,

The knave who has wounded me!
For this was not a woman. Behold,
'Tis the knave Bolozànovitch, he!"

XX.*

THE WIFE OF HASSAN AGA.

WHAT is it so white on the mountain green?
A flight of swans? or a fall of snow?
The swans would have flown, and the snow would have been
Melted away long ago.
It is neither snow-fall, nor yet swan-flight,
But the tent of Hassan Aga so white.
Sore was the wound which in battle he got,
His mother and sister (for these without blame
Might do as they listed) to visit him came;
But his wife, for the modest-minded shame
Of a matron chaste, could not.

Wherefore, when he had heal'd him his wound so sore,
Anger'd he said to his faithful spouse:
"Meet me no more, see me no more,
'Mid our children, within my white house.'
He frown'd and he rode away.
Silent with deep dismay,
The Turkish woman wept,
Bitterly wept at her husband's word,
Clothed herself with sorrow, and crept

* This poem was translated by Goethe into German, in 1789, from an Italian translation published by the Abbé Fortis in 1774; and was thus the first of these national songs and legends that ever passed from Servia into more civilized lands. Goethe's translation (Klaggesang von der edeln Fraun des Asan Aga) is unrhymed and remarkably literal.

Into her chamber, and cover'd her brows,
When the hoof of a horse was heard
At the door of the Aga's house.

The fair Aguinitza * fled trembling away
To the window, to fling herself down in her fear:
Her two little daughters came running, and they
Cried, "Mother, come back, mother dear!
For it is not our father Hassan is here,
But our uncle Pintorovitch Bey."

Back she turn'd, faltering she came,
Weeping she fell on the breast of her brother,
And . . . "O my brother," . . . she cried . . . "the shame,
From her children to sever a mother!"

The Bey held silence, nor answer'd a word,
His smile was stern but his eyes were dim,
As he drew from his silken pouch, and laid
In the hands of his sister, the letter which said
That her dower to her should, in full, be restor'd,
And she should return to their mother with him †
When the fair Turk that letter had read,
Her children she call'd to her one by one,
She kist her two boys on the brow and cheek:
She kist her two girls on their lips' young red
But when to the little one, lying alone
In the little cradle, she came,
The little one smiled as he slept:
Her heart began to break
With an inward anguish of shame:
She could neither move nor speak:
She sat down by the cradle and wept.

Then her brother Pintorovitch Bey
Drew softly the cradle away,

* The wife of an Aga; as *Pachinitza*, wife of a Pacha.
† The writing of divorce.

Lifted her into the saddle behind,
Turn'd, as he mounted, and kist her,
And rode off to his house with his sister,
Over the hills, in the wind.

Not long in the house of her mother
She rested; not even a week.
Lovers, one after the other,
Came riding to sue and to seek:
For never more lovely a lady
Breath'd beauty to trouble the land,
And soon from Imoski the Kadi
Came gayly to ask for her hand.

"O spare me, O save me, my brother
My poor heart in sunder is reft:
My poor eyes are full of old tears:
Let me not be the bride of another,
For the sake of my little ones left
For the sake of the once happy years

But of all this full lightly he thought,
And he gave to the Kadi her hand:
Then sadly the Bey she besought,
And moaning she made her demand—
On a fair paper, pure white,
These words to Imoski to write:

"*Fair greeting, in fair courtesy,*
From her that hath been given to thee,
And courtesy to her prayer!
When the noble Svats assembled be,*

* The Servian ceremonial of marriage is very peculiar. On the wedding day the bridegroom proceeds to the house of the bride, accompanied by the guests, of both sexes, who attend the marriage on *his* invitation; and who in this capacity (of guests or witnesses) are called *Svats*. He is supported by a *Koum*, or Best-man, a *Stari Svat*, or chief guest (the oldest and most honoured of the company,) who attest the marriage, and a *Dever* (paranymph or groomsman), which latter personage may be a

And ye come in a noble company
From her white house to carry thy bride,
Bring ye a long white covering fair
To cover her eyes; that so, when ye ride
Beside the white house of the Aga, she
May see not her little ones there."

When this letter was come to the Kadi's hand,
He assembled the noblest Svats of the land;
And they all in a noble company rode
To carry the bride from her white abode.
Gayly to seek her they started,
And with her they gayly departed.
But, when they were merrily riding before
The Aga's white house, from the window at once
Lookt her two little daughters; her two little sons
Came running to her from the door,
And . . . "Come back, mother dear, with us, come!
For dinner is waiting at home."

Then, weeping, the twice-wedded spouse
To the bold Stari Svat, . . . "Dear, my brother in God,
For the dear love of God, pass not by this abode!
Let the horses wait here by the house;
That I, ere I see them no more,
(My dear ones, my little ones, see them no more!)

married man. These receive the bride from the hands of her parents, and are bound not to lose sight of her till she enters her new home. All participation in the nuptial ceremonial is interdicted by custom to the parents of the bride, who do not again behold their daughter until eight days after the marriage. A mother, indeed, cannot, compatibly with established usage, attend, or be near, her daughter in child-bed. By being groomsman or witness to a marriage, a relationship is contracted with the bride's family of a nature so close and so strict as to be deemed incompatible with marriage at any future period between the groomsman and any member of that family.

May speak, though it be but a while."
And the horses stopt straightway, and stood by the door,
And she past through the door with a smile.
Gay gifts to her children she gave:
To both of her boys bold and brave
Golden jatagans rich, and to both
Of her girls a long tunic of cloth.
But when to the little one, lying alone
In the cradle, she came, she laid mournfully on
The small cradle a white orphan garment,
A little white garment, and sigh'd,
And turn'd from the cradle wild-eyed,
With looks of despairing endearment.

All of this Hassan Aga espied,
And he turn'd to his two sons, and cried,
"Little orphans, come here! come to me!
For pitiless, children, is she,
Your mother stone-hearted, the bride!"

Cruel, cruel and keen was the word!
Silent she listen'd and heard,
Heard the harsh word that he said.
To the black earth she bow'd her bright head:
She had not another reply,
Than to droop her white forehead, and die:
For the heart of the mother was broken in twain
For the love, and the loss, of her little ones ta'en.

XXI.

SLEEPLESSNESS.

Sleep will not take the place of Love,
Nor keep the place from Sorrow.
Oh, when the long nights slowly move

To meet a lonely morrow,
The burthen of the broken days,
The grief that on the bosom weighs,
And all the heart oppresses,
But lightly lies on restless eyes
Love seals no more with kisses.

XXII.

NEGLECTED FLOWERS.

Little violet, drooping all alone, like my own
Drooping heart, I would pluck thee; but there's
none, no not one!
To whom I dare to give thee: so I leave thee, and
pass on.
I would give thee gladly, gladly, if I dared, to Ali
Bey;
But too proud (ah well-a-day!) is Ali Bey — so
they say!
Proud he is! I do not dare. Would he care, he to
wear
Any flower that buds or blows? . . . save the rose,
I suppose!
No! rest there, and despair! Live or die! Thou
and I
Have no chance to catch one glance from his eye,
passing by.

XXIII.

PLUCKING A FLOWER

He O maiden, vermeil rose!
Unplanted, unsown,

Blooming alone
As the wild-flower blows,
With a will of thine own!
Neither grafted nor grown,
Neither gather'd nor blown,
O maiden, O rose!
Blooming alone
In the green garden-close,
Unnoticed, unknown,
Unpropt, unsupported,
Unwater'd, unfed,
Unkist, and uncourted,
Unwoo'd, and unwed,
O sweet wild rose,
Who knows? Who knows?
Might I kiss thee, and court thee?
My kiss would not hurt thee!
O sweet, sweet rose,
In the green garden-close,
If a gate were undone,
And if I might come to thee,
And meet thee alone?
Sue thee, and woo thee,
And make thee my own?
Clasp thee, and cull thee, — what harm would be done?

She. Beside thy field my garden blows.
Were a gate in the garden left open . . . who knows?
And I water'd my garden at eventide?
(Who knows?)
And if somebody silently happen'd to ride
That way? And a horse to the gate should be tied?
And if somebody (who knows who?), unespied,
Were to enter my garden to gather a rose?
Who knows? . . . I suppose

No harm need be done. My belovéd one,
Come lightly, come softly, at set of the sun!
Come, and caress me!
Kiss me, and press me!
Fold me, and hold me!
Kiss me with kisses that leave not a trace,
But set not the print of thy teeth on my face,
Or my mother will see it, and scold me.

XXIV.

TRANSPLANTING A FLOWER.

O MAIDEN, mother's golden treasure!
Purest gold of perfect pleasure!
Do they beat thee, and ill-treat thee,
That I meet thee all alone?
Do they beat thee, that I meet thee
All too often, all too late,
After nightfall, at the gate
Of the garden, all alone?
Tell me, tell me, little one,
Do they do it? If I knew it,
They should rue it! I would come
Oftener, later, yet again,
(Hail, or snow, or wind, or rain!)
Oftener, later! Nor in vain:
For if mother, for my sake,
Were to drive thee out of home,
Just three little steps 'twould take
(Think upon it, little one!) —
Just three little steps, or four,
To my door from mother's door.
Love is wise. I say no more.
Ponder on it, little one!

XXV.

A MESSAGE.

Sweet sister of my loved, unloving one,
Kiss thy wild brother, kiss him tenderly!
Ask him what is it, witless, I have done
That he should look so coldly upon me?
Ah, well . . . I know he recks not! Let it be.
Yet say . . . "There's many a woodland nodding yet
For who needs wood when winter nights be cold."
Say . . . "Love to give finds ever love to get.
There lack not goldsmiths where there lacks not gold.
The wood will claim the woodman by-and-by;
The gold (be sure!) the goldsmith cannot miss;
Each maid to win finds lads to woo: and I . . "
Well, child, but only tell him, tell him this!
Sweet sister, tell him this!

XXVI.

ISOLATION.

The night is very dark and very lonely:
And as dark, and all as lonely, is my heart:
And the sorrow that is in it night knows only:
For the dawn breaks, and my heart breaks. Far apart [mother
From my old self seems my new self. And my
And my sister are in heaven, — so they say:
And the dear one dearer yet than any other
Is far, far away.
The sweet hour of his coming . . . night is falling!
The hour of our awakening . . . bird on bough!
The hour of last embraces . . . friends are calling
"Love, farewell!" . . . and every hour is silent now.

XXVII.

A REGRET.

Lost empire of my maidenhood!
Could I be once more what I would,
Then what I am I would not be.
Ah well-a-day, and woe is me!
Could I a maiden be once more,
And unknow all that I have known,
And feel as I have felt of yore,
I would not change with any queen
Not for sceptre, crown, or throne,
If I could be what I have been
Would I grow what I have grown.

Lost empire of my maidenhood!
Sweetest sweet! and chiefest good!
Now that thou art gone, I know,
Could I call thee back again,
How to keep thee. Even so!
Loss is all my gain!

Would that I were with the flocks
As of old among the rocks!
For the flocks do blithely bleat,
And the mountain airs blow sweet,
And the river runneth fleet,
Running to the happy sea:
But the glory of the river,
And the gladness of the flocks,
And the mirth among the rocks,
And the music on the wind
Ministrant to a merry mind,
These are joyous things, forever
Dead, or fled, for me!

On the wind there moans for ever
One word only, which the river,

Murmuring, murmurs to the shore,
And the flocks, with chilly bleat,
Evermore that word repeat,
And that word is — Nevermore!
Nevermore, O never, never
Any more, by mount or river,
Shall I be as I have been,
A mountain maid, a virgin queen!

XXVIII.

THE BAN OF VARADIN.

A WASSAILER in wildest ways,
But foul befal the churl who says
That what he drinks he never pays,
So mad a devil dwells within
The brain of Peter Doïtchin,
The burly Ban of Varadin!*

Three hundred ducats in a day
Good sooth, he swill'd them all away!
And, when he had no more to pay,
First his massy mace of gold,
Then his coal-black horse he sold.
"Fill up the can, keep out the cold,
And let the merry devil in,
Sweetheart!" laught Peter Doïtchin,
The burly Ban of Varadin!

Quoth King Mathias† . . . "Burly Ban,
God curse thee for a brainless man,
Whose goods flow from him in the can!
Three hundred ducats in a day,
Thou hast swill'd them all away,
And, for lack of more to pay,

* Servian name for Petervardein, fortress in Hungary
† Probably Mathias Corvinus.

Thou thy massy mace of gold,
And thy coal-black war-steed bold,
For a sorry stoup hast sold."

"King Mathias, cease thy prattle!
Brainless heads are hard in battle:
Fighting men make thirsty cattle.
Hadst thou the tavern drain'd with me,
The tavern wench upon thy knee,
(So sweet and sound a wench is she!)
Thou wouldst have drunk up thy good town
Of Pesth, with Buda tower and down,
Camp, acropolis, court, and crown!"

XXIX.

FATIMA AND MEHMED.

Beneath a milk-white almond tree,
Fatima and Mehmed be.
The black earth is their bridal bed;
The thick-starréd sky clear-spread
Is their coverlet all the night,
As they lie in each other's arms so white.
The grass is full of honey-dew;
The crescent moon, that glimmers through
The unrippled leaves, is faint and new:
And the milk-white almond blossoms
All night long fall on their bosoms.

THE END.

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